



MONDAY ALERT

New York State Alliance *for* Retired Americans

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New York State Laws and Policies Set to Take Effect in 2025

Here's a look at some new laws and policies that will impact residents starting in 2025:

- **MINIMUM WAGE INCREASE:** New York's minimum wage increased to \$16.50 an hour in New York City, Long Island and Westchester County and to \$15.50 an hour in all other parts of the state, according to the state Labor Department.

The minimum wage before Wednesday was \$16 in New York City, Long Island and Westchester. It was \$15 in all other counties in the Empire State. "Putting money back in your pockets has been the focus of my first three budgets, and that includes increasing minimum wage for the lowest earners across the state," Gov. Kathy Hochul said last month as the new minimum wage approached. "With rising costs of living, this increase will help to lighten the burdens of inflation for New Yorkers while providing businesses with the time needed to adjust."

- **Public safety:** New York Gov. Kathy Hochul signed various public safety-related laws in 2024, including one that makes removing, or threatening to remove, a person's religious clothing, such as a yarmulke or hijab, a second-degree aggravated harassment charge. Another, [named after late NYPD Det. Brian Simonsen](#), requires cellphone providers to disable stolen phones in an effort to crack down on theft.
- **Consumer protections:** [Other new laws include](#) one that requires gyms and health clubs to accept membership cancellations within 10 business days of receiving the request, another that requires telemarketers to provide certain information within the first 30 seconds of a call, and another that requires restaurants that offer online delivery to post their sanitary inspection grades on their website or mobile app. The [Restaurant Reservation Anti-Piracy Act](#) also bans third-party services from charging hundreds of dollars to hold a spot at a restaurant.
- **Healthcare costs:** One healthcare-related law requires [health insurance companies to cover dyslexia exams](#) when referred by a physician, and another eliminates co-pays for insulin. Others prohibit selling medicine for an "unconscionably excessive price" during a shortage and prohibit hospitals from reporting medical debt to credit agencies. Another allows any worker to [file workers' compensation for specific](#)

[mental health issues](#) stemming from "extraordinary work-related stress."

- **Maternal health:** One new law requires 20 hours of paid time off for pregnancy-related appointments, another says maternity patients must have access to a doula, and another expands the [information prospective patients receive about facilities' policies](#) around safety drills and transferring critically ill patients or infants. Another requires Medicaid to cover remote ultrasounds and fetal non-stress tests, and another requires ingredients to be listed on diapers sold in the state.

New York Senator Kristen Gillibrand Named Ranking Member of the Senate Aging Committee



Over 59 million Americans are aged 65 years and older, and that number will continue to rise in the coming years. As this happens, it is essential that Congress leads the effort to invest in the well-being of our aging loved ones.

This week, Kirsten announced that she will become the ranking member of the Senate Aging Committee. In this role, she will continue fighting to bring down the cost of prescription drugs, protect Social Security and Medicare,

guard against financial scams, and ensure that every American can age with dignity and financial security.

Medicare Reminder

Phases of Part D coverage

The cost of your Medicare Part D-covered drugs may change throughout the year. If you notice that prices have changed, it may be because you are in a different phase of Part D coverage.

There are four different phases—or periods—of Part D coverage:

- **Deductible period:** Until you meet your Part D deductible, you will pay the full negotiated price for your covered prescription drugs. Once you have met the deductible, the plan will begin to cover the cost of your drugs. While deductibles can vary from plan to plan, no plan's deductible can be higher than \$545 in 2024, and some plans have no deductible.
- **Initial coverage period:** After you meet your deductible, your plan will help pay for your covered prescription drugs. Your plan will pay some of the cost, and you will pay a copayment or coinsurance. How long you stay in the initial coverage period depends on your drug costs and your plan's benefit structure. For most plans in 2024, the initial coverage period ends after you have accumulated \$5,030 in total drug costs. In 2025, the initial

coverage period ends after you have accumulated \$2,000 in out-of-pocket drug costs. Out-of-pocket costs include what you pay for covered drugs during the deductible phase and in copays/coinsurance.

After \$2,000 in out-of-pocket costs, you enter catastrophic coverage and pay \$0 for covered drugs for the rest of the year.

- Note: Total drug costs include the amount you and your plan have paid for your covered drugs.
- **Coverage gap:** After your total drug costs reach a certain amount (\$5,030 for most plans), you enter the coverage gap, also known as the [donut hole](#). The donut hole closed for all drugs in 2020, meaning that when you enter the coverage gap you will be responsible for 25% of the cost of your drugs. Beginning in 2025, this coverage phase will be eliminated, and you will enter catastrophic coverage after meeting the \$2,000 out-of-pocket cap.
- **Catastrophic coverage:** In all Part D plans, you enter catastrophic coverage after you reach \$8,000 (\$2,000 in 2025) in out-of-pocket costs for covered drugs. This amount is made up of what you pay for covered drugs and some costs that others pay. During this period, you owe no cost-sharing for the cost of your covered drugs for the remainder of the year.

President Biden to Sign Social Security Fairness Act into Law on Monday

President **Biden** is scheduled to sign the Social Security Fairness Act, H.R. 82, into law at the White House on January 6. The event is the culmination of decades of activism by Alliance members and it follows House and Senate passage of the legislation in December.

Alliance leaders and members, including President **Robert Roach, Jr.**, Executive Director **Richard Fiesta**, **Bette Marafino**, Co-Chair of the National WEP-GPO Repeal Task Force and President of the Connecticut Alliance, and **Roger Boudreau**, Regional Board Member, will attend the bill ceremony at the White House.

The law restores full Social Security benefits to more than 2 million Americans. Affected retirees will now be eligible to receive up to an additional \$600 per month in Social Security benefits, [calculated](#) retroactively to 2024.

"For years the government has taken away Social Security benefits from millions of retired federal, state and local government employees who worked as teachers, police, firefighters, postal workers and general employees," said Alliance Executive Director **Fiesta**. "This is long-overdue and would not have happened without the tenacity of Alliance members across the country."

The Social Security Fairness Act eliminates the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP), which unfairly reduce Social Security benefits for public sector retirees who receive a public pension — or the spouse or survivor of a Social Security beneficiary — who worked in a job not covered by the Social Security program.

The WEP and GPO disproportionately affect lower-income workers and women.

“We thank all the activists and elected officials who are making this much-awaited outcome a reality,” Fiesta added. “Once President Biden signs the bill into law, millions more Americans will be able to enjoy the more secure retirement they earned.”

Hundreds of Thousands of Seniors to See Lower Drug Costs in 2025



As of January 1, the \$2,000 annual prescription drug cap is in effect for Medicare Part D beneficiaries. The cap is

automatically applied to Medicare Part D plans, so no change is needed on your part.

Once a senior's yearly Part D spending hits the \$2,000 threshold, the rest of your eligible costs will be covered. Costs covered by the cap include deductibles, copayments, and coinsurance for drugs in your formulary. What is not included in the cap is drugs that are outside of Part D plans and Part D premiums.

Last year the cap was about [\\$3,500](#). As a result of the change, 19 million people are expected to save an average of [\\$400](#) each. In addition, because of President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) prescription drug law, the doughnut hole coverage gap ended on December 31, 2024.

The Department of Health and Human Services has also announced that through the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Medicare Part B enrollees will receive lowered Part B coinsurance rates for [64 prescription drugs](#) from January 1, 2025 - March 31, 2025. Among the drugs are medications to treat cancer, osteoporosis, and substance abuse disorder.

These savings will reach over 853,000 people and are in addition to savings on over 120 drugs that Medicare recipients have already been saving on through the IRA Medicare Prescription Drug Inflation Rebate Program. The

IRA requires drug companies that raise the prices of certain drugs covered under Part B and Part D faster than the rate of inflation to pay Medicare a rebate.

"We applaud President Biden for his relentless work to make prescription drugs more affordable for seniors," said Alliance President **Robert Roach, Jr.** "With provisions such as the \$2,000 annual Part D cap and the lowered Part B coinsurance rates, Medicare recipients will see savings that bring real, positive change to both their finances and their health."

Many Billionaires are Already Done Paying Taxes on Social Security for the Year

According to [public data](#) on **Elon Musk's** income, he likely paid all of this year's Social Security taxes on earnings from Tesla at 15 minutes past midnight on New Year's Eve. In fact, in the first few hours of 2025, more than [229 U.S. workers](#) earning above \$50 million per year will have likely paid all their Social Security taxes for the year.

In contrast, over 164 million workers (about 94% of us) pay Social Security taxes all year long. This wide disparity is due to the cap on maximum earnings subject to Social Security tax — \$168,600 in 2024 and now \$176,100 in 2025.



Elon Musk

If federal policy makers raised the cap on the maximum earnings subject to Social Security taxes, and included more income — interest, business receipts, capital gains —

in the definition of earnings, as Medicare does, Social Security could close its solvency gap.

"If the wealthiest Americans paid their fair share, we could strengthen the Social Security program and even expand benefits," said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. "That was true last year and it is true again this year. This common sense improvement to Social Security would deliver greater retirement security for all."

KFF Health News: In Year 7, 'Bill of the Month' Gives Patients a Voice

In 2024, our nationwide team of gumshoes set out to answer your most pressing questions about medical bills, such as: Can free preventive care really come with add-on bills [for items like surgical trays](#)? Or, why does it cost so much [to treat a rattlesnake bite](#)? Or, if it's called an urgent care emergency center, [which is it](#)?

Affording medical care continues to be among the top health concerns facing Americans today. In the seventh year of KFF Health News' "Bill of the Month" series, [readers shared](#) their most perplexing, vexing, and downright expensive medical bills and asked us to help figure out what happened. Our reporters analyzed \$800,000 in charges, including more than \$370,000 owed by 12 patients and their families.

Read more [here](#).

Alliance Congratulates Staff Member David Blank on His Retirement

After 23 years of service, David Blank, Deputy Director of Communications at the Alliance, is retiring January 3, 2025.

"David has been with the Alliance since our founding, and his contributions have made a real difference for older Americans and for our organization," said President Roach. "He's been part of every legislative victory we've had, from lowering prescription drug prices to defeating efforts to

cut the benefits we've earned. He's also a pleasure to work with and we wish him all the best in his next chapter."