



# Onondaga County Legislature

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## HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE MINUTES – FEBRUARY 19, 2025 CODY M. KELLY, CHAIR

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Mr. McCarron, Mr. Meaker, Ms. Harvey, Mr. Bush  
**ALSO ATTENDING:** Chairman Burtis; also see attached list

Chair Kelly called the meeting to order at 12:31 p.m. and the previous meeting’s minutes were approved.

1. **CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES:** Megan Rooney, Deputy Commissioner; Archie Wixson, Commissioner of Facilities
  - a. **BOND: A Resolution Authorizing Construction of the Hillbrook Vocational Building in and for the County of Onondaga, New York, at a Maximum Estimated Cost of \$5,500,000, and Authorizing the Issuance of \$5,500,000 Bonds of Said County to Pay Costs Thereof (\$5,500,000)**

### *Hillbrook Vocational Building & Improvements (NEW)*

**DEPARTMENT:** Children & Family Services (CFS)

**PROJECT TYPE:** Renovations & Upgrades **PROJECT**

**STATUS:** Proposed

**BUDGET STATUS:** Partially Authorized

**PHASE STATUS:** Design/Engineering



#### **SUMMARY**

Children & Family Services (CFS) intend to construct a vocational instruction building on the Hillbrook Detention Center grounds. This building will expand instructional programs to maintain compliance with mandates. Additional facility improvements will be included in the work.

#### **FUNDING BY SOURCE (000's)**

| SOURCE                 | Prior      | 2025         | 2026     | 2027     | 2028     | 2029     | 2030     | 6-Year       | Total        |
|------------------------|------------|--------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|--------------|--------------|
| Borrowing to Authorize | -          | 5,500        | -        | -        | -        | -        | -        | 5,500        | 5,500        |
| State Aid              | 200        | -            | -        | -        | -        | -        | -        | -            | 200          |
| <b>TOTALS</b>          | <b>200</b> | <b>5,500</b> | <b>-</b> | <b>-</b> | <b>-</b> | <b>-</b> | <b>-</b> | <b>5,500</b> | <b>5,700</b> |

#### **SCOPE & DETAILS**

An earlier version of this project was included in last year's CIP, but the project has since refined its scope. This project has since been resubmitted to reflect the changes.

Hillbrook Juvenile Detention Center, under the Department of Children and Family Services has planned to develop and construct a vocational instruction building on land behind the existing facility building. Additional elements will include a covered outdoor exercise structure, a secondary perimeter detention fence line, select upgrades to secure doors and hardware, an expansion of the parking area, additional exterior lighting and CCTV, a staff break area, a sensory room, an various technology upgrades. This new building will house 3-4 classrooms, an administrative/staff office, a break room and restrooms. This proposed building will help the department comply with mandates.

*In 2020, the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) authorized \$200,000 for the design phase of this project. An Architectural and engineering firm has been selected, funded by a previous authorization. The design is expected to be completed in early 2025 and authorization for the funding of construction will be requested January 2025. This new building will house 3-4 classrooms, an administrative office, a break room and restrooms. This proposed building will help the department comply with Raise the Age mandates. It is intended to be about 3,500 square feet.*

*In 2025 we intend to seek legislative authorization for \$5,500,000 in borrowing to finance the construction phase.*

Facilities presented the following:

- Requesting authorization of a bond to cover \$5.5M improvements at the Hillbrook Detention Center
- Have been working on project for a couple of years
  - Previously authorized \$200K to begin the design of a vocational building
  - In-house architects assisted with scoping and conceptual design and turned over to VIP Architecture
  - State Corrections Commission is supportive of more improvements than what is being asked for; it was suggested to request the best plan for the next 5-10 years
    - Initially asked for a 3,000 square foot vocational building with an instructional setting
    - Turned into also including:
      - Outdoor covered pavilion for recreational activities
      - Renovation of medical suite to a staff development and break area
      - Sensory deprivation room
      - Surveillance upgrades, cameras, door and hardware changes
      - Improvements to loading dock area
      - Parking lot lighting and additional staff parking
    - In order to meet standards of growing facility, improvements are deemed necessary
  - Currently at a standstill with architect team waiting for funds in order to determine construction cost

CFS presented the following:

- County will front money for future reimbursement from State
- Submitted application; State authorized reimbursement of initial \$200K
- If any part of current design is not approved, will pare down the project
- No local dollars will be used

#### **Questions/Comments from the Committee:**

Facilities answered the following:

- Is the contingency budget and overrun accumulated in the \$5.5M?
  - There is a 10% contingency built in to the probable construction cost
  - Will fine tune when 90% design is reached and reaffirm before going out to public bid
- Much of this work is required due to Raise the Age mandates and higher needs
- Will there be a secure tunnel from building to building once the new stand-alone structure is built?
- How will people be moved between buildings when they may be an escape risk?
  - Will have fenced in, canopy covered corridor to move kids from main building to instructional setting
    - This allows outdoor recreation with other groups without interfering with transport through groups
  - The curriculum in the new vocational building will be for auto component repair, IT repair, and life skills
- Including this ask, is there an idea how much money the County has spent on Hillbrook Capital Projects in the last 8 years?
  - Approaching \$20M over the last 20 years
- Is that local dollars?
  - Cannot speak for a couple of the initial Capital Projects
  - Since Raise the Age standard has been implemented, the majority has been reimbursed
  - Raise the Age instigated the most recent requests for improvements or investment

CFS answered the following:

- Where do improvements need to be made?

- Which improvements need to be made based on regulations?
  - The building is to expand upon multi-use program for residents and staff training
  - Builds upon identifiable high needs
  - State has been very communicative of what it should be
- What is the capacity?
  - Currently at capacity
  - When not at capacity, always look to house out-of-County residents
    - Receive higher reimbursement for out-of-County residents
- Have there been situations where Onondaga County individuals were housed in other counties?
  - There have been circumstances with transport and if there are beds open, but does not happen frequently
  - Facility has been expanded enough to meet the needs for the County
- Based on Raise the Age and Bail Reform, has there been a decrease in the number of people that would have been housed at Hillbrook as opposed to those who are now for different offenses?
  - For the most part, yes
- Would like Hillbrook and County to be recognized as a leader in this area of serving the population
  - OCFS did a tour of all districts; Onondaga County is further ahead of most counties
- At one point, the State was trying to make it a regional setting serving some of the more rural counties that do not have a facility of their own
- Historically Onondaga County keeps more secure people and sends non-secures to Cayuga County
- Will set up a tour once some of the projects start moving

*A motion was made by Mr. McCarron, seconded by Ms. Harvey, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.*

**b. Concerning Certain Proposed Improvements to the Hillbrook Juvenile Detention Center; Approving the Classification of an Unlisted Action Under the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA); Accepting the Environmental Assessment Form; and Accepting and Adopting the Negative Declaration**

Law Department presented the following:

- This is a reiteration of design elements
- Negative declaration is proposed as improvements are within existing footprint
- Do not anticipate environmental impacts

*A motion was made by Mr. McCarron, seconded by Mr. Meaker, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.*

**2. HEALTH:** Kathryn Anderson, Commissioner; Dr. Saravanan Thangamani, SUNY Upstate Citizen Science Program  
**a. Transfer Resolution (\$100,000)**

**PURPOSE:**

*To transfer funds in the Contingent Account in the Health Department's 2025 Budget to support tick surveillance and tick education.*

**BACKGROUND:**

*Funds were set aside in the contingency account with the intent of providing services to Onondaga County residents to better understand the prevalence and manage Lyme and tick-borne diseases. The funds are proposed to be distributed as*

**Tick Surveillance (SUNY Upstate): \$75,000**

*Tickborne diseases have become increasingly prevalent across the nation and NYS and constitute a growing public health concern. Efforts to prevent and diagnose tickborne disease is significantly aided by access to current and accurate information on the prevalence and type of pathogens found at the local level.*

*Dr. Saravanan Thangamani at SUNY Upstate has been conducting tick surveillance using a Citizen Science approach (residents mail in ticks found on themselves or their pets), where the ticks are identified and tested for any diseases. Since 2019, they have received over 3,000 ticks from Onondaga County, of which 36% carried a pathogen that could cause human disease. We know from his data that Lyme disease and other tickborne diseases are increasing in our area, representing a significant public health threat to Onondaga County. The only other testing source, NYSDOH, performs collection and testing of only 50 ticks per year in Onondaga County, which is insufficient to have our finger on the pulse of these emerging pathogens. Beyond surveillance, the program provides direct benefit to our residents by generating individualized information about exposure to infected ticks, which can inform the measures they take to protect themselves and their families. OCHD seeks continued local support in 2025 to maintain this irreplaceable public service. In exchange for this support, Onondaga County residents will continue to receive a 50% discount on testing costs.*

Further details on the program can be found here: [Upstate Tick Testing Laboratory \(nyticks.org\)](https://nyticks.org)

**Tick Education (CNY Lyme and Tick-Borne Disease Alliance): \$25,000**

*The CNY Lyme and Tick-Borne Disease Alliance is a collaborative of providers, scientists and community members who support research, drive education and promote awareness to combat tick-borne diseases. Continued funding is requested to support the Alliance's education and outreach activities related to this important local public health threat.*

Further details on the Alliance can be found here: <https://cnylymealliance.org/>

- Onondaga County is hot spot for tick-borne diseases such as Lyme, Powassan, Babesia
  - Burden is increasing with earlier and warmer springs and later falls
- The level of attention NYS gives to this problem is not as high as it needs to be
  - NYSDOH tests 50 ticks per year in Onondaga County
- Dr. Thangamani is a vector-borne disease expert and researcher
  - Upstate Citizen Science program has tested over 3,000 ticks from Onondaga County since its inception in 2019
  - Individuals mail ticks to the lab for testing
    - The lab will identify the tick and infectious disease it may be carrying
    - Results provided to the individual within a couple of days
  - From 2019-2022 Dr. Thangamani was using his personal research funds to do testing free of charge
  - In 2024, the lab received \$75K from the County to support reopening the lab
    - Onondaga County residents now pay \$10 per test
- Majority of ticks found in Onondaga County are Deer ticks
  - 30-40% are infected with some sort of pathogen that could cause human disease; mostly Lyme disease

**Questions/Comments from the Committee:**

- What is the charge for testing?
  - Health Department
    - When lab reopened in 2024, the cost was \$75 outside of County, \$37 within County
    - Currently \$10 for County residents
- Is there any concern that capacity will be reached and will not be able to keep up with demand?
  - SUNY Upstate
    - Previously, when testing for free, received 1,000-2,200 per month and could process 10,000-12,000 per year
    - Lab has capacity of 20,000 ticks per year
    - Anticipate a large number of submissions from County residents at \$10 price point
- Is that a sustainable model going forward?
  - SUNY Upstate

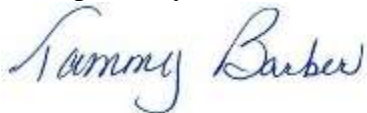
- This is the perfect model; assured funding allows to keep staff on payroll
- Thank you Dr. Anderson and Dr. Thangamani for being here
- Would tick-borne disease be described as a pandemic, local public threat, or concern?
  - Health Department
    - Would back away from “pandemic”, as it refers to something that comes upon us and hopefully goes away
    - Refrain from using terms that make it seem short-term
    - Tick-borne disease is very much here and a big clinical and public health problem
    - Lyme disease can be treated but can cause long-term health problems
    - Tick-borne disease will likely increase
- I have a concern about underfunding; not comfortable with low level of commitment
- County should do more to protect people
- Certain populations do not have access to medical care
- Most people in the County are probably not aware of the program
- Who is responsible for community outreach, SUNY Upstate or CNY Lyme and Tick-Borne Disease Alliance?
  - Health Department
    - Both organizations are actively involved in identifying alternative and additional sources of funding
  - SUNY Upstate
    - Try to communicate with public through website, media, podcast, and news outlets
    - Have tick map available with breakdown of different pathogens
    - Engage with educating clinicians
    - CNY Lyme and Tick Alliance does more outreach because education is their primary purpose
    - SUNY Upstate does mostly research to provide information so CNY Lyme knows where to target education
    - Need to target hot spots with more education, pamphlets, and sign boards
    - When program started, most human tick encounters were at Green Lakes
      - When information was provided to media and websites, human tick encounters drastically decreased
    - County Health Department makes informed public health decisions based on data produced by the lab
- Does the County Health Department do any outreach within the community?
  - Health Department
    - Health Department is active in media and speaking with the public to engage awareness
- Law: How does a tick get to the lab?
  - SUNY Upstate
    - Tick bags are distributed for free through the County and YMCA
    - Bags have a QR code with instructions and mailed to the Upstate Tick Testing Lab
    - Test results are emailed to the individual within a couple of days
- It is very effective to educate healthcare providers
  - SUNY Upstate
    - Healthcare providers from around the nation are invited to annual two day tick symposium every September
    - Symposium is held at the CNY Biotech Accelerator at Upstate Medical University
- What is next on the horizon with the current research being done?
  - SUNY Upstate
    - Will probably have a Lyme disease vaccine within the next 3-4 years; currently in phase 3 clinical trials
    - Concerns with other ticks migrating to County with other tick-borne diseases
    - Tri-State area seeing Lone star ticks and Dog ticks; moving north due to climate change and human behavior
  - Health Department
    - Lyme disease has a better outcome when it is recognized and treated early
    - Arming residents with knowledge of a testing result allows them to advocate for themselves
- Is there a direct test (blood or otherwise) that says an individual has Lyme disease?
  - Health Department

- There is no slam dunk with Lyme disease
  - Early on, an individual may or may not have Lyme disease whether they test positive or negative
  - A positive test down the road does not necessarily mean an individual has Lyme disease
  - The best thing to do is to check body for ticks and find out if it was infected or not
- Is there a concept of fiscal effects of early surveillance?
    - SUNY Upstate
      - Surveyed what people did with results
      - 50% of respondents gave results to clinician and received treatment
      - The program directly correlates to expedited healthcare treatments with tick-borne disease
      - Currently writing a research article that will be published within the next few months

*A motion was made by Mr. Meaker, seconded by Mr. McCarron, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.*

The meeting was adjourned at 1:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



TAMMY BARBER, Deputy Clerk  
Onondaga County Legislature

## ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE: HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

DATE: FEBRUARY 19, 2025

| NAME (Please Print)  | DEPARTMENT/AGENCY          |
|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Saravanan Thangamani | Upstate Medical University |
| Rachel Burkitt       | CFS                        |
| Megan Looney         | DCFS                       |
| Rebecca Shmetz       | OCMD                       |
| Steve Smard          | Fin Ops                    |
| Katie Anderson       | OCMD                       |
| Dan Mulvihill        | DMB                        |
| John DeSantis        | Leg                        |
| Darcie Lesniak       | Leg                        |
| Ryan Ockenders       | Law Dept.                  |
| Jim Bube             | Leg.                       |
| Ben Yaus             | Law Dept.                  |
| Joe Frateschi        | Legal Counsel              |
| Archip Wixson        | Facilities                 |