



Onondaga County Legislature

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PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MINUTES – FEBRUARY 9, 2021 VIRTUAL MEETING CHRISTOPHER J. RYAN, CHAIRMAN

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. Rowley, Ms. Kuhn, Mr. Holmquist, Mr. McBride

ALSO ATTENDING: Mr. Knapp, Mr. May, Ms. Cody, Mr. Bush, Mr. Kinne, Mrs. Ervin; Mr. Vadala, Ms. Lesniak, Ms. Kaminski, Ms. McNamara, Mr. DeSantis, Mr. Paro, Ms. Vilardi, Mr. Frantzis, Mr. Conway, Mr. Frateschi, Mr. Bleye, Ms. Velasco, Mr. Donnelly, Mr. Morgan

Chairman Ryan called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m. *A motion was made by Ms. Kuhn, seconded by Mr. Rowley to waive the reading of the previous committee meeting. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.*
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1. JUSTICE CENTER OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE:

a. **Confirming Appointments to the Onondaga County Justice Center Oversight Committee (Kerry-Ann Crumbie, Gregory Scammell)**

Mr. Ryan:

- These are two Legislative appointments – still have one more vacancy

Mr. Knapp

- Committee does a great job led by Marissa Mims - thank Marissa and her committee for their great work
- Two members have asked not to be reappointed – appreciate their past commitment
- Do not know Crumbie personally but resume is very impressive – recommended by Marissa and other committee members
- Second appointee is Greg Scammell, known for 50 years, outstanding individual, resume is understated, Vietnam veteran, Town Supervisor and Board member for 30 years, retired from National Grid, involved with jail ministry, worked in the justice center pre COVID, first hand knowledge from inmates point of view, will be an excellent addition to the Committee

Mr. Ryan

- Happy these two are stepping forward, volunteering their time and taking interest in this Committee

A motion was made by Ms. Kuhn, seconded by Mr. McBride to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED

2. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT: Sheriff Eugene J. Conway

a. **Informational: Correction's Update**

Mr. Ryan

- Heard second hand that conversations were going on with CE and State delegations regarding status of correctional facilities

- If there are conversations thought it would be important for this Committee to know where the conversations are going, if anywhere; presume conversations are a result of the Governor's budget to share or consolidate correctional facilities
- Information allows committee to make better decisions for future capital expenditures

Mr. Conway:

- Last January the CE wanted to discuss an attempt to allow Counties to share jails – measure that didn't end up passing – believe the CE had been to a meeting where this subject was discussed, also had a phone call from Cayuga County Sheriff regarding sharing jails – possibly sending Cayuga County inmates to Onondaga County
- CE talked about a large deficit that would be handed down from Albany; potential of opening our jails to take on inmates from other Counties for additional revenue
- Cautioned CE that inmates are always more of a liability – CE thought perhaps it would generate income
- Suggested perhaps there are other ways to save money – perhaps an opportunity for Onondaga County to bring all inmates to one facility - the downtown facility which is the largest
- This is the only conversation that the Sheriff has had with anyone in the CE's office
- COVID happened after discussion with CE – busy keeping staff and inmates healthy since COVID

Mr. Ryan

- As a result of bail reform, inmate populations declining, and two facilities half utilized – are there any additional discussions since that meeting
- Years ago we were talking about a capital improvement project in building another tower in the Justice center
- Appreciate the update – what will the bargaining units look like – two different titles – one making less than the other - there is a lot of discussion that needs to happen

Mr. Conway

- As you know, background is about efficiency and squeezing the most out of tax payer dollars
- Would caution against making decisions based on just numbers
- Overcrowding causes problems; only three months into Raise the age and bail reform when COVID hit
- Judging population based on last 12 months
- When someone is sentenced to more than one year they go to a State facility – historically the State will tell the County twice a month how many inmates the State would take – since COVID the State has not accepted any State ready inmates – closing in on 100 inmates at Jamesville that are State ready
- Very difficult to see the true population numbers during COVID
- When facilities are full you then pay to board inmates out; much harder for visitation and attorneys because of travel; these factors have to be dealt with
- 700 beds total – a misleading number – separate female from male – female medical from female nonmedical – all the regulations skew the total bed number
- Not opposed to looking at the numbers but shouldn't make decisions until we are somewhat back to normal
- The positive of having two facilities with COVID has allowed for better spacing
- CSEA and PSA members, union issues, exam issues – all have to be taken into consideration

Mr. Rowley:

- Curious about private operators of jails – are you familiar with them, have you seen it, is it a long-term option

Mr. Conway:

- No private jails in NYS – probably something that prevents that from happening - some privately run within the Country – most are maximum security
- County moved a few years ago to a private medical vendor – one step in the direction

Ms. Kuhn:

- Great national movement to move away from privatization – heard there isn't a lot of happiness with current medical vendor - going to a private vendor has had its ups and downs - hope we don't go in that direction

Mr. May:

- Interested in seeing effects of bail reform after COVID
- Does the State dictate staff levels at the Jail and Justice Center, if so, is this a problem? Sheriff's ability to make day to day changes to staffing

Mr. Conway:

- Staffing levels are contentious, State does staffing analysis, Commission would have a more objective analysis – State has never responded – feels there is a reason behind this
- When an audit is done they never provide a staffing analysis – even when requested the Commission denies the request
- Have been able to move inmates between facilities – two different staff titles - tested by unions but have been in compliance
- Bail reform and Raise the Age (“RTA”) should diminish population but unsure until we are post COVID
- Looks at 101 and Overtime lines – on the police side we are able to attract laterals – on custody side we are hurting – looking to have an academy to try to fill a minimum of 12 positions
- Courts are all closed – transport units aren't doing transports so these employees are being shifted
- No inmates positive – one employee positive at this time

Mr. Ryan:

- To which facility would you add 12 people?

Mr. Conway:

- Guidelines from commission – church services are an example – inmates are entitled to church services – have to have 1-2 deputies available to have church services – this is where the staffing holes need to be filled
- More of a need at the justice center for staff – twice as many inmates at justice center
- Normally same candidate takes both tests – decision based on shifts versus facility
- Surrounding Counties are doing academies – looking at virtual academies but need to include defensive tactics which can not be done virtually

Mr. Ryan:

- Regarding inmates that are State ready – State facilities won't take them – currently have 85 – most we have ever had

Mr. Conway:

- Made futile attempts to make State take inmates – State should pay but never has
- Currently have 85 - will soon have almost 100 inmates that are State ready – State's excuse is they won't take COVID positive inmates – now have 0 positive and they still won't take inmates
- The CIP project that was presented was a third phase – understand the committee's caution but please know that project wasn't thrown in at the last minute – it was part of a long-term plan

Ms. Kuhn:

- Reason was to look at where 2021 budget lands and project would not begin until the Fall so no one would be deprived of air conditioning
- Are we continuing to bill NYS for 85 inmates that are State ready – how is it billed

Mr. Conway:

- Have talked to State – we track the numbers – not sure of frequency - just one of the bills that never gets paid
- More bureaucracy than anything else; focus energy in other places that give us more traction
- Answered Mr. Kinne's question regarding talking to State delegates – same happens with all the Counties – seems to be more of a State convenience -

Mr. Ryan:

- This is an ongoing conversation – if there is a way to do more effectively and efficiently let's discuss

Mr. Conway:

- Will certainly keep committee up to date on any future conversations

A motion was made by Ms. Kuhn, seconded by Mr. Rowley, to adjourn the meeting. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Melanie V. Lardi".

MELANIE VILARDI, Deputy Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature