

# ERIE COUNTY LEGISLATURE



92 Franklin Street - 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Buffalo, New York 14202

May 14, 2019

Hon. April N.M. Baskin, Chair  
Erie County Legislature  
92 Franklin Street – 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Buffalo, New York 14202

Chairwoman Baskin,

As you are aware, County Executive Poloncarz has recently forwarded his 2018 Year-End Budget Balancing Amendments to the Legislature for consideration. This year, we are sitting on an unprecedented surplus of over \$46.5 million. While we have had private conversations about amending the county executive's proposal in order to fund our mutual priorities, we have not yet fleshed those discussions out during a Finance & Management Committee meeting. We do appreciate the brief discussion we had in committee on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, but in light of recent developments, we think further public discussion is warranted. As you know, the year-end budget balancing amendments provide an important opportunity for the Legislature to set **our** priorities and, in surplus years, fund community projects our constituents need.

Given the huge surplus from 2018, we plan to propose amendments to fund initiatives that we have been discussing at the Legislature for the past several months, specifically, funding to combat poverty in the City of Buffalo and rural areas throughout Erie County and funding to help increase public safety through the implementation of body cameras for the Sheriff's Office. We have all publicly stated that these are two of our biggest priorities in the Legislature. Our amendments will include \$2 million to poverty initiatives, split equally between the City and the rest of Erie County, and \$2 million for a two-year pilot program for Sheriff's Deputy body cameras. It is intended that the funding for these programs replace a portion of the \$5 million set aside for the Albright-Knox.

County Executive Poloncarz is proposing to fund the Albright-Knox Art Gallery's latest expansion project with \$5 million worth of taxpayer funding. This would be the single largest infrastructure investment in a non-county owned asset during his tenure as County Executive. The Albright-Knox is unquestionably a jewel for Erie County's cultural community, but after receiving \$52 million in donations from a single donor, we question whether the \$5 million of taxpayer money could be used more wisely. Furthermore, the Albright-Knox has an endowment fund that has never been higher in history, and the County continues to fund its

operational expenses to the tune of nearly \$1 million each year. As Legislators, we have a duty to fund the priorities our constituents deem most important—not those of the County Executive. Erie County is home to the third poorest city in America. We must take a stand and show that our priorities favor combatting poverty and providing for public safety.

Lastly, it is important to note the fact we are even having a conversation about how to spend the 2018 surplus is somewhat shocking. Last December, the County Executive warned us that a \$10,000,000 tax cut would blow a hole in the 2019 budget, and lead us to financial ruin. Yet today, we are considering budget balancing amendments for the 2018 Budget with a total rollover greater than \$46 million. It has become clear that that the County Executive lied to us. The 2019 Budget could have provided tax relief to every resident in Erie County, but unfortunately we missed that opportunity. In the coming weeks, the Legislature will have a rare second chance to improve public safety and provide meaningful assistance to our community's less fortunate. We cannot miss again.

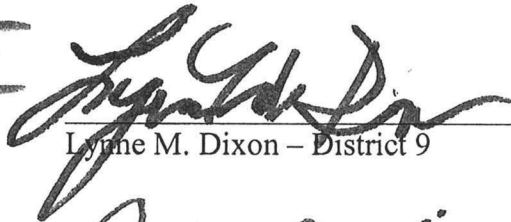
We appreciate your consideration of the above, and ask that we hold another committee discussion, and do our best to work together. It is up to us to set our own priorities that best represent the people of Erie County.

Sincerely,

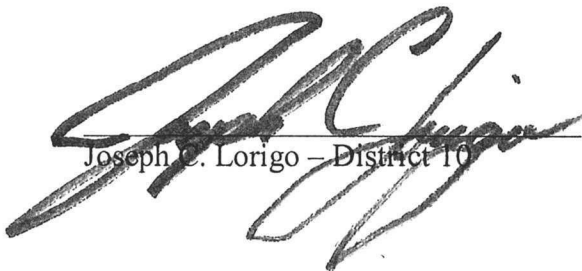
Erie County Legislature's Minority Caucus



Edward A. Rath, III – District 6



Lynne M. Dixon – District 9



Joseph C. Lorigo – District 10



John J. Mills – District 11