



ERIE COUNTY LEGISLATURE

HON. TED MORTON
LEGISLATOR

County Executive Mark Poloncarz
95 Franklin Street, 16th Floor
Buffalo, NY 14202

July 27, 2015

Dear Executive Poloncarz,

Since 2012, we have attempted to reform the Erie County Department of Child Protective Services (CPS). We have hired new managers to lead the department, we have hired more caseworkers to help alleviate the strain and stress on our employees and with the help of our local state delegation, we have advocated for changes in a child protective system long needing reform.

Throughout this discussion many of us have raised concerns. We didn't believe that more upper level managers were the answer to the department's problem, so we advocated for more workers that directly work with families to investigate accusations of abuse. We didn't believe the previous commissioner of the department you appointed fully understood the challenges facing CPS, so we asked for her removal. All of this was done keeping in mind the main priority, making sure that the children in Erie County, often those most vulnerable, can trust that we will protect them when many of them have lost hope.

Officials from your Department have come into the legislature to speak about statistics. According to reports by the Investigative Post and Channel 2, numbers being reported by Commissioner Dirschberger are in direct contradiction to the facts. I have real concerns that Legislators and the public are being misled by fictional calculations to hide the real truth of what is happening in CPS.

The facts are that our caseloads per worker are still high, morale is still at all-time lows in the department and both current and former employees consistently have reached out to legislators saying the true story isn't being told, that the issue isn't about numbers.

I have talked to these employees and I agree. These aren't just numbers. We are talking about families, we are talking about our children.

I do not believe the fundamental problems of the department have been fixed. I also believe efforts to spin a positive image of the situation are misleading, if not a flat out lie. When you have failures, to fix them you need to acknowledge them. The only people being hurt otherwise are the kids we are trying to protect.

My biggest concern at this time is your silence on the issue. Time and again you present county employees before the legislature and the press to face tough necessary questions. And time and again we hear reports about how you refused to appear in front of media publicly to answer

those same tough questions. Again, we appreciate comments from your employees and press secretary, but those people were not elected by the people of Erie County. I believe you need to speak openly and honestly to the residents of Erie County on issues both good and bad, they deserve at least as much.

I believe you want to improve Erie County Child Protective Services and I believe sincere ideas and reforms have been put forward, but after years of conversation and results I don't believe they are working. You need to be a part of the conversation. Myself and my colleagues are prepared to work with you personally, in the light of the public, to address these issues.

As Vice-Chair of the Health and Human Services committee, I formally ask you to attend a special meeting of the committee to discuss these issues. You are the Executive of this county, and we need to have a public and transparent conversation addressing our failures and how we can successfully move forward. We need to protect those that cannot protect themselves, and we need to stop making things sound better than they actually are. I'd ask you please accept my invitation, upon your response, we can work to set a time and date. Thank you for consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ted Morton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "M".

Legislator Ted Morton
8th Legislative District