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Comptroller: Hire Deputies and Save \$3 Million

Erie County Comptroller Mark Poloncarz, in the midst of a campaign for County Executive, has released a study suggesting that the hiring of 67 new officers would cut overtime costs at the Jail and Holding center by almost \$3 million.

The study says the jail and holding center logged more than 290,000 overtime hours in one year, at a cost of approx. \$10 million.

The study was done at the request of the County's Control Board, The Erie Fiscal Stability Authority

VERBATIM, from the County Comptroller's Office:

POLONCARZ'S REVIEW OF SHERIFF'S JAIL MANAGEMENT PROJECTS SKYROCKETING OVERTIME COSTS BUT IDENTIFIES WAY TO SAVE NEARLY \$3 MILLION OVER NEXT 5 YEARS THROUGH ADDITIONAL HIRES

In Addition to Saving Millions, Additional Staffing at Holding Center and Correctional Facility Will Increase Safety for Both Officers and Inmates

ERIE COUNTY, NY—Today, Erie County Comptroller Mark Poloncarz released a review of overtime at the Erie County ("County") Holding Center and Correctional Facility that includes a number of bold proposals in an effort to manage staffing costs that have skyrocketed in recent years. This review of overtime is a follow up of two audits performed by the Comptroller's Office in 2007 which reviewed overtime and other costs at the Holding Center and Correctional Facility and was contained in a list of potential projects requested by the Erie County Fiscal Stability Authority ("Control Board").

After reviewing the factors contributing to unsustainable increases in overtime at both the Holding Center and Correctional Facility, Audit proposes the hiring of sixty-seven (67) additional deputies and corrections officers, which they project will save the County **a net of more than \$2.9 million over the next five years.**

"The cost of overtime within Jail Management has skyrocketed over the past several years and without taking action to address this problem it will continue to increase at an unsustainable rate," **said Poloncarz.** "In 2007, my office investigated the root causes and made certain recommendations that would have saved millions, but which were not followed. We once again reviewed the matter and now believe that by hiring 67 additional deputies and corrections officers, we will save the County more than \$2.9 million over the next five years. Not only will we realize significant cost savings, but by hiring additional staff we will dramatically increase the safety of both officers and inmates at these facilities. This is what I call a win-win situation for everyone involved."

Specifically, Audit recommends:

- The number of deputies within both the Security and Prisoner Transport functions at the Holding Center total 449. This would require **hiring fifty (50) new deputies.** The savings for hiring the fifty (50) new deputies is over \$1.8 million over the next five years.

- The number of correction officers within the Security function at the Correctional Facility total 205. This would require **hiring seventeen (17) new correction officers.** The savings for hiring the seventeen (17) new correction officers is over \$1.1 million over the next five years.

Audit's recommendations will not eliminate all overtime within Jail Management. The staffing levels needed, and subsequent additional costs, to eliminate all overtime at the Holding Center and Corrections Facility would be prohibitively high—over 760 persons, resulting in the hiring of over 109 new deputies/corrections officers— and far exceed any savings derived from the elimination of overtime. Additionally, this increase would result in overstaffing of facilities during times of reduced workload.

Both the number of hours and cost to the County for mandated overtime within the Sheriff's

Office Division of Jail Management has dramatically risen over the past several years and will continue to increase at an unsustainable rate. More than 90 percent of this overtime comes from three specific areas (Security and Prisoner Transportation at the Holding Center and Security at the Correctional Facility) within Jail Management.

For example in 2010, in these three areas alone, deputies and corrections officers logged more than 290,000 overtime hours at a cost of more than \$10 million (approximately \$32.7 million for regular time and overtime combined).

The number of mandated overtime hours has risen so greatly primarily because of a dramatic increase in the number of posts at the Holding Center and Correctional Facility since 2007. Because all posts have been mandated by the either the U.S. Department of Justice ("DOJ") or the New York State Commission on Corrections ("COC") reducing the number of posts is not an option.

Poloncarz noted that the COC is also performing an analysis of posts at the Holding Center. Preliminary discussions indicate that additional posts will be recommended by the COC. Failure to respond to the additional workload these posts would represent will drive overtime costs even higher than the present levels.

Additionally, in the 2007 audit, the Comptroller's office recommended the Sheriff improve both the timekeeping system at the Holding Center and move to more sophisticated software for prisoner and jail management. These recommendations have been implemented to some extent: the 2005 payroll sheets used for our 2007 audit were hand-typed. The Sheriff's payroll sheets used for this analysis were created in a Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet.

Audit recommends investing in jail management software that would allow computerized staffing and compatibility to the County's SAP system. Additionally, jail management software can include the ability to track inmate's medications, gang affiliations and medical insurance.

Poloncarz added, "While we applaud this movement from 1965 to 1995 technology, we believe the Sheriff can do better and repeat our recommendation from 2007 for the Sheriff to invest in new jail management software."

Lastly, Poloncarz acknowledged exceptional level of cooperation received from the Sheriff's Department throughout the course of this review, noting a reduction in overtime hours within Jail Management as a unanimous goal everyone agrees upon.

Poloncarz concluded, "From the Comptroller's office, Control Board and taxpayer's perspective a reduction means tangible cost savings, from the Sheriff's perspective it means increased safety and a greater quality of life for staff that are in extreme cases forced to work upwards of 90 hours in a week."