

# Comptroller's report targets rampant overtime at county jails

## Auditors suggest 67 new hires

BY DENISE JEWELL GEE  
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Jail Management Division of the Sheriff's Office have skyrocketed," Poloncarz said. "And without taking any action going forward, they will continue to skyrocket at an unsustainable rate."

The two facilities have come under increased scrutiny in recent years by the state Commission of Correction and the federal Department of Justice.

County auditors recommend the county hire 67 new deputies and corrections officers to curb overtime costs.

The comptroller's report did not discuss individual pay for deputies and corrections officers, but a Buffalo News review of 2010 payroll records found:

- Twenty deputies and corrections officers more than doubled their base pay in 2010 with overtime.
- Some employees slated to earn salaries that ranged from \$42,372 to \$53,812 actually earned between \$95,021 and \$130,211 in 2010.

Auditors also found that some jail employees worked an alarming number of double shifts. One deputy at the Holding Center worked 16 hours a

Deputies paid overtime to guard empty rooms. Employees who doubled their salaries with overtime pay. A corrections officer who earned overtime pay while working 18 straight days.

These are extreme examples of overtime at the county Holding Center and Correctional Facility.

But a report released Wednesday by County Comptroller Mark C. Poloncarz painted overtime as a widespread problem at the two jails caused by new posts mandated by state and federal agencies.

As a result, county auditors found, nearly a third of the total pay for deputies and corrections officers in the Division of Jail Management went toward overtime in 2010. That year, the county spent more than \$10.8 million on overtime within the division.

"Overtime costs within the



Derek Gee/Buffalo News file photo

**"Without taking any action going forward, they will continue to skyrocket at an unsustainable rate."**  
Comptroller Mark C. Poloncarz, on overtime costs at the county's Holding Center and Correctional Facility

day for six straight days, said Deputy Comptroller Michael R. Szukala. Another employee at the Correctional Facility worked for 18 days in a row, he said.

"When we're burning out employees in one of the most dangerous jobs you can have in all of Erie County, that's not a good thing," Poloncarz said.

The comptroller's report es-

timates that hiring 50 new deputies and 17 new corrections officers would save the county more than \$2.9 million during the next five years.

"We can't control the number of posts," Poloncarz said. "But what we can control is how we man them."

The recommendation to hire more guards is unlikely to gain traction with Erie County Exec-

utive Chris Collins. Grant Loomis, a Collins spokesman, said the county executive "believes firmly that overtime is always less expensive than hiring additional staff."

"Because employees bring with them increases in insurance, health insurance, other fringe benefits . . . it is our position that using existing employees and having them work overtime is financially more beneficial for taxpayers," Loomis said.

Undersheriff Mark N. Wiperman said all jail overtime "was necessary as per the mandates and requirements imposed on the Sheriff's Office" — a point county auditors did not dispute.

"The Sheriff's Office does continue to fight the bureaucratic mandates imposed on us by the New York State Commission of Correction. For example, some of those that force us to pay overtime to our correctional officers and deputies to guard empty visiting rooms and hallways on a weekly basis," Wiperman said in an email to reporters.

Wiperman said multiple

deputies sometimes are paid overtime to guard an empty visiting room at the Holding Center because of state requirements for the number of hours it must remain open.

While some deputies and corrections officers who topped the overtime list appeared to be nearing retirement and could use the extra hours in their final years to increase pensions, others were more recent hires.

Szukala said the Comptroller's Office has received tipline calls from deputies complaining they were forced to work overtime.

County auditors stopped short of recommending that the county hire enough deputies and corrections officers to cut all overtime within the division.

To eliminate overtime, the report says, the county would have to hire more than 109 new deputies and corrections officers — the cost of which would be "prohibitively high" and would "far exceed any savings derived from the elimination of overtime."

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# Campaign awards \$86,000 to 47 arts groups

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NEWS ARTS CRITIC

Give for Greatness, the cultural fundraising campaign launched earlier this year by Artvoice Publisher Jamie Moses, awarded \$86,000 to 47 local arts groups in a ceremony Wednesday morning in the Central Library.

The grass-roots campaign, which was launched in response to the elimination of county funding for most Erie County arts

public and I think really generated a lot of positive momentum," Callahan said.

In addition to the 37 arts groups that were cut from the 2011 Erie County budget or whose grants were withheld, the campaign funded 11 organizations that had never received county funding. These include the Alt Theatre, Buffalo United Artists, Configuration Dance, Torn Space Theater, LehrerDance, the Jewish Repertory Theatre, Playhouse of American Classics, the Western New York Book Arts Center and

money that he and the Common Council have set aside for local arts groups, each organization is set to reach 80 percent its 2010 allocation.

Give for Greatness was originally conceived as an annual campaign rather than a year-round fundraising organization, Callahan said, but the scope of the project has grown since its formation was announced in the spring.

She said Give for Greatness will work in concert with the recently formed Greater

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