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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## COMPTROLLER MYCHAJLIW RELEASES REVIEW ON WIRELESS DEVICES

*The number of taxpayer funded cell phones increased over the review period*

(Buffalo, New York) –Erie County Comptroller Stefan I. Mychajliw completed his review of the Department of Information and Support Services (DISS) use and control of wireless devices. The review period started on January 1, 2012 and extended until June 30, 2013.

In January of 2012, the county had 412 wireless devices. By June of 2013, the county had 490. The review also found one “pool phone” used by an employee in the Department of Probation was used to purchase 40 ringtones in a single day at a cost of \$102.89. The review recommends the employee or Department reimburse taxpayers for the unnecessary purchase.

“No one on my staff has a cell phone paid for by taxpayers and nor do I. It is important for me to lead by example. Most people already have a personal cell phone that they would have in their possession anyways. I don’t see a need for the taxpayer to fund one as well,” said Mychajliw.

The Comptroller was careful to mention that certain employees responsible for emergency services and situations should have mobile phones made available to them. The review was necessary to ensure there wasn’t rampant abuse in the administration of taxpayer funded cell phones. The review turned up substantial findings in four areas of concern:

- Poor Device Accountability
- Outdated Policies and Procedures
- Non-Existent Records Retention
- Poor Cost Controls

“On its face it is a good thing that wireless costs have gone down, and we thank New York State for that,” said Mychajliw. “However, costs should be down substantially more. The number of phones has gone up while plan costs have decreased,” added the Comptroller. Decreases in plan costs are determined by the price negotiated through a purchasing contract with New York State. Those costs are not controlled by the County, but rather, are set by a competitive bid process between Verizon and New York State.

### **POOR DEVICE ACCOUNTABILITY**

The review noted that three phones were still assigned to former county employees, despite being used by current employees. Five non-county employees were assigned wireless devices to enable them access to the internet. One non-county employee was assigned a cell phone. DISS, which administers the wireless devices, has no policies and procedures in place for providing phones to non-county employees.

“This is unacceptable. One of my recommendations is that the county immediately adopt policies and procedures to protect taxpayers,” said Mychajliw.

A total of 115 devices cannot be tracked to a specific user, because they are assigned to departments rather than people. The Comptroller feels strongly that when you remove people from the equation, you simultaneously remove accountability. The review strongly recommends that when possible, phones should be assigned to specific individuals.

### **OUTDATED POLICES AND PROCEDURES**

The last revision to the employee handbook addressing the use of wireless devices was written in 2001. As part of the review, the Comptroller’s Office issued an internal review memorandum (IRM) requesting that DISS immediately update their policies and procedures regarding wireless devices. In response to our IRM, they were updated in December 2013.

### **NON EXISTENT RECORDS RETENTION**

“Our review uncovered the fact that the county has no records retention policy when it comes to taxpayer funded cell phone bills. We were quite surprised to learn Department administrators did not keep copies of previous cell phone bills,” said Mychajliw. The Comptroller recommended that the county immediately start complying with New York State records retention requirements and keep accessible copies of cell phone invoices and contracts for six years.

### **POOR COST CONTROLS**

There appears to be no substantive controls over the cost of cell phones and wireless devices. “When plans become more affordable, the county squanders the potential to save money just to increase the number of phones it has. That does not respect taxpayers who foot the bill,” said Mychajliw.

“Advances in the availability of technology should be decreasing our need for these devices, not paving the way to increase it,” the Comptroller concluded.

The review, which has been submitted to the Erie County Legislature, had four main objectives:

- Determine the number and type of devices in use
- Determine the cost of each device
- Determine the overall annual cost of providing wireless services
- Determine compliance with the contract utilized by the county with Verizon Wireless

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