



STEFAN I. MYCHAJLIW

ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER

Wednesday, September 12, 2018 – For immediate release

Contact - Communications Director Jessica O'Neil: 716.858.4910 (office) - 716.572.3552 (mobile)

AUDIT: BACKLOG OF UNRESOLVED WELFARE FRAUD INVESTIGATIONS, HAMPERED BY ARCHAIC 'NOTE CARD' SYSTEM

Comptroller Stefan Mychajliw's audit of Special Investigations Division uncovers staff still keeping records on note cards with no electronic back-ups

(ERIE COUNTY, NY) - Erie County Comptroller Stefan I. Mychajliw Jr. released an audit of the Special Investigations Division (S.I.D.) and found that the department is at risk of losing critical data by using an archaic note card filing system without any electronic back-up whatsoever. The audit also uncovered a backlog of hundreds of unresolved welfare fraud investigations going back almost three years, and the department hasn't implemented all critical changes recommended by then Comptroller Mark C. Poloncarz dating back to March of 2011.

"Many years ago, then Comptroller Mark Poloncarz proposed numerous recommendations for this important investigative department to clean up its act. That was seven years ago. Now that County Executive Poloncarz is in charge of this department, there's no excuse for not implementing all of the reforms he himself proposed. Why are welfare fraud investigators still using paper index cards to store information and records, without a computer backup? What if cards are lost or destroyed?"

"Keeping investigative records on card stock is a joke. Unfortunately for taxpayers, this is no laughing matter. There are hundreds of unsolved welfare fraud cases going back to February of 2015. Maybe more money would be retrieved from scammers if welfare fraud cases could be reviewed electronically. The sad thing about this: in 2011 former Comptroller Poloncarz recognized the same problems I'm still talking about. There's no excuse why current County Executive Poloncarz can't make all of the changes recommended by former County Comptroller Poloncarz," said current Erie County Comptroller Stefan I. Mychajliw.

For the second time in seven years, the Erie County Comptroller is strongly recommending that new policies and procedures be executed as soon as possible for the Special Investigations Division of the Department of Social Services. S.I.D. is responsible for investigating fraud involving many social services benefit programs, including the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, commonly called Food Stamps) and Safety Net.

“The private sector would never, ever use paper note cards to document and store critically important investigative records. Never. This is inefficient and extremely risky. These are serious cases of fraud perpetrated on the taxpayer. If an investigator were to lose those tangible documents, their case is comprised,” added Comptroller Mychajliw.

The audit also found that the Department of Social Service’s Special Investigations Division backlog has unresolved cases that date back to February of 2015. At the time of the audit, there was a backlog of 339 cases. Most of those unresolved cases, 153 of them, concern Food Stamp fraud (SNAP). By not resolving the hundreds of cases, S.I.D. is failing to perform its function as a department.

S.I.D. was most recently audited in March 2011 by then Comptroller Mark Poloncarz, who took over as County Executive just 10 months later, and still, seven years later some basic upgrades have still not been implemented.

“Welfare fraud is a slap in the face to hard working families struggling to make ends meet. Honest taxpayers put in a hard day of work to pay their bills, feed their families and scrimp and save whatever little is left over. Scammers that break the law by collecting benefits they are not entitled to drives up the cost for taxpayers. These benefit programs are in place for a reason: to temporarily help people that qualify to receive a short-term hand up, not a lifetime handout. Lawbreakers abusing the system must be stopped.”

“It is unacceptable to learn that the Special Investigations Division failed to fully implement recommendations made by Mark Poloncarz himself. Because these issues were first uncovered seven years ago by the current County Executive when he served as Comptroller, it was surprising to see that he hasn’t done more to bring S.I.D. into compliance with his own recommendations. My hope is that our audit finally brings about all of the recommended improvements, which quite frankly are simple, common sense changes,” concluded Comptroller Mychajliw.

###



[@Stefan.Mychajliw](#)



[@StefanMychajliw](#)



[Erie County Comptroller](#)

[Website](#)