



# STEFAN I. MYCHAJLIW

## ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER

May 5th, 2021 – For Immediate Release

Contact – Office of Erie County Comptroller at [Comptroller@Erie.gov](mailto:Comptroller@Erie.gov), or 858-8400

### **POLONCARZ ADMINISTRATION WANTS TAXPAYER DOLLARS USED TO SEND POLITICAL APPOINTEES ON VEGAS JUNKET**

*Comptroller seeks Legislature input before authorizing thousands of dollars for flights, hotels and meals on taxpayer funded Vegas junket, which includes family and guests*

**(ERIE COUNTY, NY)** – Erie County Comptroller Stefan Mychajliw requests more input from the Erie County Legislature and the Poloncarz Administration before approving a taxpayer funded junket to Las Vegas for five political appointees and their family/guests. The Poloncarz Administration requested approval to pay for the Las Vegas junket in February 2021 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and when a vaccine was not readily available to the public.

The Poloncarz Administration wants to send political appointees and their family/guests to Las Vegas for the National Homeland Security Conference at the MGM Grand Casino from August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021 to September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021. Sponsored by the National Homeland Security Conference, they described in great detail the luxurious casino based hotel where Poloncarz political appointees and their family members will stay:

“On the South end of the Strip across from the Tropicana, this colossal, emerald-colored casino resort is fronted by a signature 45-foot bronze lion. The modern rooms have sleek furnishings, glass-topped desks and marble bathrooms; suites add living areas and Roman bathtubs. Some wellness-themed rooms feature air purification systems, aromatherapy diffusers, and access to a special lounge.”

*Source: [www.nationalhomelandsecurity.org](http://www.nationalhomelandsecurity.org) website*

The official conference website and schedule also boasts about social nights/parties planned for every night. It includes a party so large it is hosted at Allegiant Stadium, home to the NFL's Las Vegas Raiders. Keep in mind this is a conference of emergency management planners and senior government officials.

These are the same people that have been telling you to stay home, keep socially distanced, avoid non-essential gatherings and not to visit your grandparents or attend church on Easter Sunday. Mark Poloncarz issued those warnings to all of us this year before Easter, which fell on Sunday, April 14<sup>th</sup>. Two months before his own Chief of Staff and emergency managers were planning a trip to Vegas.

The request to send multiple political appointees on a taxpayer funded junket to Las Vegas in order for them to take classes in person and have face to face instruction in Las Vegas comes at the same time the Poloncarz Administration discourages children from attending in-person classes in schools across Erie County.

“If there's an award for most 'tone-deaf' request to spend taxpayer dollars during a pandemic, the Poloncarz Administration wins this dubious distinction. Kids and parents are told classrooms aren't safe for in-person instruction. But Mark Poloncarz wants to send multiple political appointees on an all-expenses paid junket to Las Vegas so they can sit indoors and supposedly learn. If this junket is all about training and professional development, why did his political appointees request to bring their family and guests along?”

“COVID-19 is one smart disease. Erie County taxpayers will catch and die from COVID-19 if they go to school, church, or a bar after a certain time. But Poloncarz political appointees are fully protected if they gather with thousands of people from across the country at hotels, airports and Vegas casinos,” said Erie County Comptroller Stefan I. Mychajliw.”

“I need Legislature guidance on whether or not multiple political appointees need to be sent on a junket to a Vegas casino with marble bathrooms and Roman bathtubs. Is this the best way to spend taxpayer dollars? If this junket is supposedly about homeland security issues, why are family members and guests of political appointees going? We need answers before this junket bill is paid,” said Comptroller Mychajliw.

The Poloncarz Administration wants thousands of taxpayer dollars used to send the following political appointees on the Vegas junket:

- Mark Poloncarz Chief of Staff Jennifer Hibit
- Purchasing Director Vallie Ferraraccio
- Public Works Commissioner Bill Geary
- Emergency Services Commissioner Daniel Neaverth
- Emergency Services Special Assistant Melissa Calhoun

“Mark Poloncarz’s Chief of Staff is a purely political patronage position. It appears this junket to a high-end casino is a way for the County Executive to reward his political aide with a taxpayer funded Vegas vacation. Why is Commissioner Neaverth requesting to bring along family? This entire junket is a slap in the face to struggling families across Erie County. Many businesses closed. People struggle to pay bills during this pandemic. Yet the Poloncarz Administration wants to spend tax dollars on political appointees taking a jaunt to Vegas during a pandemic,” added Comptroller Mychajliw.

The Office of Erie County Comptroller calculated the cost for the five political appointees to attend the Vegas junket. It is still not clear, based on emails and invoices where family/guests of the political patronage hires are staying while in Vegas. If they are staying in the same hotel paid for with taxpayer dollars, it is uncertain how these individuals will pay to stay in the same casino hotel.

- Five conference attendees: \$3,375 (total of \$675 each)
- Hotel: \$2,300 (\$460 each)
- Roundtrip airfare: \$1,680 (five tickets, \$336 each)
- Meals: undetermined

At this time, the Office of Erie County Comptroller is not paying the bill for the Vegas junket until numerous concerns are addressed by the Poloncarz administration before the Erie County Legislature.

“There should be a conversation before a committee of the Erie County Legislature. This Vegas junket is the height of arrogance and hypocrisy. In Erie County kids can’t learn in a classroom or play sports. Churches must limit attendance. Businesses cannot operate the way they want to make a living. Families cannot spend holidays with one another indoors. But if you’re politically connected to Mark Poloncarz, taxpayers will spend thousands of dollars flying you across the country to stay in a luxurious Vegas casino. No problem for political patronage employees to gather in airports, stay in crowded conferences and hotels,” concluded Comptroller Mychajliw.

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## Neaverth, Daniel - Orders & Payments

### National Homeland Security Conference 2021

I am sending each invoice separately, sorry for the 5 emails coming your way.  
Olivia

#### Order Details

Order Number: ZLNH5QMWBVR (Submitted on 2/25/2021)

Invoice Number: NHSC21-02252021-0022-0022

Item	Registrant	Fee	Qty	Amount Ordered (USD)	Amount Paid (USD)	Amount Due (USD)
Full Conference Registration	Neaverth, Daniel	\$675.00	1	\$675.00	\$0.00	\$675.00
Host Social Event Guest Pass	Neaverth, Daniel	\$50.00	1	\$50.00	\$0.00	\$50.00

Total

**Amount Ordered (USD): \$725.00**

**Amount Paid (USD): \$0.00**

**Amount Due (USD): \$725.00**

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## Ferraraccio, Vallie - Orders & Payments

### National Homeland Security Conference 2021

#### Order Details

Order Number: V3NHNTDVGVT (Submitted on 3/5/2021)

Invoice Number: NHSC21-03052021-0070-0069

Item	Registrant	Fee	Qty	Amount Ordered (USD)	Amount Paid (USD)	Amount Due (USD)
Full Conference Registration	Ferraraccio, Vallie	\$675.00	1	\$675.00	\$0.00	\$675.00
Host Social Event Guest Pass	Ferraraccio, Vallie	\$50.00	3	\$150.00	\$0.00	\$150.00

Total

**Amount Ordered (USD): \$825.00**

**Amount Paid (USD): \$0.00**

**Amount Due (USD): \$825.00**

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## Hibit, Jennifer - Orders & Payments

National Homeland Security Conference 2021

### Order Details

Order Number: NLNV7HL9X3V (Submitted on 3/23/2021)

Invoice Number: NHSC21-03232021-0140-0141

Item	Registrant	Fee	Qty	Amount Ordered (USD)	Amount Paid (USD)	Amount Due (USD)
Full Conference Registration	Hibit, Jennifer	\$675.00	1	\$675.00	\$0.00	\$675.00
Total						
<b>Amount Ordered (USD): \$675.00</b>						
<b>Amount Paid (USD): \$0.00</b>						
<b>Amount Due (USD): \$675.00</b>						

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## Geary, William - Orders & Payments

National Homeland Security Conference 2021

### Order Details

Order Number: MBNKRMR3XDX (Submitted on 2/26/2021)

Invoice Number: NHSC21-02262021-0033-0033

Item	Registrant	Fee	Qty	Amount Ordered (USD)	Amount Paid (USD)	Amount Due (USD)
Full Conference Registration	Geary, William	\$675.00	1	\$675.00	\$0.00	\$675.00
Total						
<b>Amount Ordered (USD): \$675.00</b>						
<b>Amount Paid (USD): \$0.00</b>						
<b>Amount Due (USD): \$675.00</b>						

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## Calhoun, Melissa - Orders & Payments

National Homeland Security Conference 2021

### Order Details

Order Number: D7NV69P82XJ (Submitted on 2/25/2021)

Invoice Number: NHSC21-02252021-0023-0023

Item	Registrant	Fee	Qty	Amount Ordered (USD)	Amount Paid (USD)	Amount Due (USD)
Full Conference Registration	Calhoun, Melissa	\$675.00	1	\$675.00	\$0.00	\$675.00
Total						
<b>Amount Ordered (USD): \$675.00</b>						
<b>Amount Paid (USD): \$0.00</b>						
<b>Amount Due (USD): \$675.00</b>						

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**From:** [REDACTED], [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, April 28, 2021 1:10 PM  
**To:** [REDACTED] >  
**Subject:** RE: invoice

One more favor to ask 😊

I just entered 5 conference registration invoices, two of our employees are bringing guests to an event while at this conference. Per the vendor instructions, I need to include their personal checks when I mail the County check . Any way you can call me to pick up the check when ready? Or forward this to appropriate person there?  
- Here are details:

V#147378  
PO# 4400014310  
\$3,375

Thank you!

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## 2021 HOST HOTEL - MGM GRAND

### #NHSC2021 IS COMING TO THE MGM GRAND!

The National Homeland Security Conference provides attendees with exceptional educational and informative sessions on best practices and emerging trends in Homeland Security and Emergency Management. 2021 marks the 14th annual conference, and the first time the conference will be in Las Vegas, Nevada. To top it off, the event will be taking place in the heart of the strip, at the MGM Grand, located at 3799 S Las Vegas Blvd, Las Vegas, NV 89109.

On the South end of the Strip across from the Tropicana, this colossal, emerald-colored casino resort is fronted by a signature 45-foot bronze lion. The modern rooms have sleek furnishings, glass-topped desks and marble bathrooms; suites add living areas and Roman bathtubs. Some wellness-themed rooms feature air purification systems, aromatherapy diffusers, and access to a special lounge.

Group rates are available!  
Use reference code: SNHS0821MG

*The rate expires Thursday, 7/29/21 or when the NHSA room block is filled, whichever comes first.*

The MGM Grand is a quick, 5-minute drive from McCarran International Airport (LAS). The hotel does not provide transportation to and from the airport. Taxi and Rideshare services are available. You may contact the MGM Concierge to assist with booking shuttle or Limousine transportation.

