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MORE FEDERAL COVID-19 FUNDS FLOW TO ERIE COUNTY

Comptroller advises Legislature of proper use of \$89 million; reopening of economy and vaccines should end emergency powers and misuse of overtime

(ERIE COUNTY, NY) – Erie County Comptroller Stefan Mychajliw announced the deposit of \$89,223,547 in 2021 COVID-19 relief funds from the federal government that is now in the possession of Erie County government. With the recent deposit, Comptroller Mychajliw issued two warnings/recommendations to the Erie County Legislature. One, fulfill their oversight function by ensuring these federal COVID dollars are spent appropriately and legally. Two, with the additional revenue and more taxpayers being vaccinated, it is time the Legislature revoke emergency powers given to the Erie County Executive.

The \$89,223,547 that was deposited into Erie County coffers on May 17th, 2021, represents half of the total \$178 million allocated to Erie County in the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act. The Comptroller sent correspondence to the Legislature laying out four specific guidelines as put forth by the National Association of Counties and the U.S. Treasury as to how this latest round of relief money can be spent by local governments.

“The CDC says we no longer have to wear masks at most locations if vaccinated. Businesses are reopening. Kids are headed back to classrooms full time. Events canceled last summer are resuming. While it should have happened long ago, we are starting to get back to normal. That should signify an end to emergency powers given to this Administration since March of last year. This should also end the abuse of overtime money paid to political patronage employees not seen in any other county in New York State,” said Comptroller Stefan Mychajliw.

According to the National Association of Counties (NACO), the most recent round of federal COVID-19 funds can be spent on:

- Supporting the Public Health Response
- Addressing negative economic impacts
- Replacing public sector revenue loss
- Broadband, water, and sewer infrastructure

“Many small businesses and taxpayers suffered over the past year and a half. I strongly suggest doing what we can to assist them. We should also make smart investments repairing our dilapidated infrastructure,” said Comptroller Mychajliw.

Erie County received \$160 million in federal CARES Act funds in 2020. Once the final installment of 2021 relief funds are allocated for this year, Erie County will have received more than \$338 million in a little more than a year to help the county through the challenges brought on by a global pandemic.

The Comptroller warns if the guidelines on how to spend this money are not adhered to, Erie County could find itself in a similar position to where it was several years ago. A 2013 federal audit said Erie County should repay \$48.5 million in disaster relief that was associated with costs incurred during the 2006 “October Surprise” storm. The Homeland Security Inspector General’s office at that time found that the county violated rules of how contracts would be awarded and how the federal revenue was spent.

“Fortunately, we were successful in fighting to stop that punitive repayment. The last thing we want is for the federal government to come back years later with their hand out and say ‘pay it back. You misspent COVID-19 aid money.’ The County Executive and legislators need to make sure they are spending these dollars appropriately,” concluded Comptroller Mychajliw.

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