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ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER

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COMPTROLLER PROVIDES ROADMAP TO FUND HAZARD PAY FOR FRONTLINE WORKERS

Mychajliw encourages Erie County to maximize millions of unspent dollars never used for a new roof at ECC to aid AFSCME union workers

(ERIE COUNTY, NY) – Erie County Comptroller Stefan Mychajliw proposed utilizing a smaller portion of the almost \$180 million in COVID relief federal dollars allocated to Erie County on front line union workers at ECMC and Erie Community College. Comptroller Mychajliw provided an easy path for the Poloncarz Administration to provide hazard pay to union workers that served on the frontlines of the county's fight against COVID.

The proposal to provide COVID-19 hazard pay to union workers include police, certified nurses aides, hospital aides, pharmacy techs, maintenance workers, cleaners, patient transports, dental assistants, biomed techs, recreation assistants, burn techs, household assistants, patient support aides, laundry workers, housekeepers and head janitorial staff.

These union workers at ECMC and ECC were placed in high-risk areas where COVID-19 patients were treated, but they do not currently receive the extra hazard pay. At the community college cleaners and janitorial staff were asked to sanitize areas where COVID patients were temporarily housed. These union employees would be eligible for hazard pay under the plan proposed by Comptroller Mychajliw.

For the years 2015 through 2018 Erie County budgeted and borrowed for \$12 million of roofing projects at the community college. Of that, \$6,348,478 remains unspent. Another \$14.3 million was budgeted in 2019 and 2020 for college-wide improvement projects. Of that amount only \$54,020 has been expended.

Strangely, the Poloncarz Administration wants to allocate an additional \$2 million out of federal COVID funds to fix and repair the roof at Erie Community College, even though they haven't spent most of the \$26 million they borrowed to do the job.

So, Comptroller Mychajliw proposes using the \$2 million earmarked towards fixing the roof at Erie Community College, and utilizing it for hazard pay for the union employees at ECC and ECMC.

“Taxpayers continue to pay interest on borrowed money for projects that Erie County has yet to spend. The Poloncarz Administration still hasn’t spent much of that money. You’re paying interest on it. Why would they then waste federal relief dollars on those same projects when there are so many other needs in the community? It lacks reason. It lacks vision. Makes zero sense. Utilize some of the borrowed \$26 million never spent to finally fix the roof at ECC. Then use the additional \$2 million earmarked for that project to give union workers well deserved hazard pay,” said Comptroller Mychajliw.

The Comptroller suggests the funds allocated for the roofing work instead be earmarked for hazard pay for some of the estimated 1,050 AFSCME frontline workforce at ECC and ECMC.

“These workers have been left out of the Administration’s plan to provide additional pay to some Erie County workers. Yet they were on the front lines of this COVID battle. This community struggled for the past 16 months. From businesses to families to schools and neighborhoods. We must support union workers, especially those who put their health and safety at risk to fight COVID-19,” said Comptroller Mychajliw.

Erie County received \$168 million in CARES Act funding in 2020. It is slated to receive a total of \$178,447,094 in federal dollars from the American Rescue Plan this year and next year.

Comptroller Mychajliw recommends the Erie County Legislature work with the County Attorney’s Office and Legislature Counsel to craft an amendment to the Administration’s spending proposal that would allow for the \$2 million to be spent on the frontline AFSCME workforce.

“I provided a clear and legal path for Erie County to do the right thing for our union workers. To spend it on projects already funded is insanity,” concluded Comptroller Mychajliw.

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