



STEFAN I. MYCHAJLIW

ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER

September 2, 2020 – For immediate release
Contact – Office of Erie County Comptroller, 854-8400

HEALTH COMMISSIONER SURPASSES \$100,000 MARK IN COVID OVERTIME AND HOLIDAY PAY

Erie County continues paying overtime and holiday pay to salaried, political appointees, all billed to the federal COVID fund

(ERIE COUNTY, NY) – Erie County Comptroller Stefan I. Mychajliw, Jr. released updated data today on overtime and holiday pay expenses for salaried or managerial confidential employees charged to the federal COVID-19 fund. The report finds that overtime and holiday pay continue to rise for county employees, including some of Erie County’s highest paid political appointees who would not typically receive these two types of payments.

In addition to their salaries, many political appointees or salaried workers have been receiving tens of thousands of dollars in overtime income from the CARES Act federal funding. Erie County received \$160 million in federal relief intended for COVID-related expenses not previously budgeted for in 2020.

The updated report looks at overtime and unutilized time up to the pay period ending August 14, 2020. It shows that 838 employees have charged a total of \$3,612,947 for 68,520 overtime hours worked. Of that amount, \$907,310 has been paid to 54 MC employees, or 25.1% of all COVID overtime paid, with the Erie County Health Commissioner remaining atop that list, collecting more than \$100,000 in overtime and holiday pay since March of 2020. Managerial employees make up 6.1% of the county workforce.

“We updated our report on overtime and holiday pay so the Legislature has the most recent data prior to their return from recess. It is our understanding that it is the Legislature’s desire to hold public committee hearings on this issue. The Office of Erie County Comptroller thought it was best to give them the most recent numbers,” said Erie County Comptroller Stefan Mychajliw.

Erie County Health Commissioner Dr. Gale Burstein received \$103,374 in overtime since the start of the Coronavirus pandemic. That’s an increase of \$19,378 since the Office of Erie County Comptroller’s last report that looked at overtime for the pay periods beginning in March and ending July 3, 2020, and is in addition to her salary of \$207,292.

The report shows that in addition to overtime, \$124,445 has been spent on 2,323 hours of holiday pay, more than the County Executive’s annual salary of \$118,376. Of that holiday pay, \$34,153 was paid to MC employees.

The Health Commissioner accounts for \$4,210 in holiday pay. The \$107,584 received by the Health Commissioner in overtime and holiday totals more than the base pay of 98% of the Erie County workforce.

“We are not casting aspersions on any county employee. It is my job as the Chief Fiscal Officer to report data in a timely manner to the Erie County Legislature. This is information Legislators asked for. It is my fiduciary duty to provide it,” added Comptroller Mychajliw.

While more than \$3.6 million has been paid in overtime to county employees since the onset of COVID-19, the report also shows that more than \$5,865,044 has been paid in salaries to Erie County employees who did not report to work and who were not able to work remotely. In other words, nearly \$6 million was paid to county employees who, through no fault of their own, could not work and remained at home.

“A lot of taxpayer dollars were spent on overtime. At the same time the county also shelled out millions for many to stay home and not work. Let’s learn from this. In the future, a better plan can be put in place to better utilize our workforce and keep costs as low as possible,” said Comptroller Mychajliw.

The report also analyzed the amount of overtime per pay period since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic. It found that the overtime charged to COVID-19 for political appointees has generally decreased each pay period since the peak pay period ending March 27, 2020 where the amount of overtime paid to managerial confidential employees totaled \$160,353. By comparison, the pay period ending August 14, \$25,389 was paid to MC employees in overtime.

“Any time we are in a prolonged period of dealing with a crisis we should look at the most effective and reasonable ways of managing the crisis from both a personnel and financial perspective. Erie County lawmakers will have to decide whether spending nearly \$4 million on overtime, and \$6 million on salaries for employees not to work makes the most sense. It’s my job to provide them updates and data. I will continue to do that so they can hopefully make the best informed decisions for taxpayers,” concluded Comptroller Mychajliw.

###