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ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER

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COMPTROLLER CALLS ON UNION TO PROTECT HEALTH OF RETURNING EMPLOYEES

While Comptroller Mychajliw wants to work with union to keep returning employees safe, he still strongly recommends employees that can, be allowed to work remotely

(ERIE COUNTY, NY)- Erie County Comptroller Stefan I. Mychajliw Jr. sent a letter to CSEA Local 15 President Denise Szymura, raising concerns about plans for many Erie County employees to return to the workplace Monday, June 29th. The Poloncarz Administration plans to bring Social Services employees back to the Rath building and other county locations.

This comes after several county workers reached out personally to the Comptroller, expressing concern for their health and safety. Comptroller Mychajliw is advocating for Erie County to adopt a permanent, remote workplace model that will allow those employees that are able to do so to continue working remotely.

"I'm concerned about the health and safety of our hard-working employees. They are getting a lot of work done remotely under difficult circumstances. Many said to me they are extremely concerned about contracting a deadly disease by coming back to the workplace. A lot of workers are scared about contracting COVID-19 and spreading it to their children and elderly relatives," said Comptroller Mychajliw.

Recent data from the New York State Department of Health reported an increase of COVID-19 hospitalizations in our area just this week. Erie County Health Commissioner Dr. Gale Burstein and Erie County Executive Mark C. Poloncarz also released data on June 24th, 2020 showing increases of Coronavirus cases amongst the young.

"We're really worried about this trend."

Source: Dr. Gale Burstein, www.buffalonews.com, "County Sees Spike in COVID-19 Cases Among The Young Amid Reopening," June 24, 2020

"Many senior citizens died when New York State sent seniors stricken with Coronavirus back into nursing homes. I hope and pray Erie County does not bring back healthy employees to an unsafe work environment, only to have them spread a contagious disease to their friends and family. I will to work collaboratively with my partners in government to address these concerns," added Comptroller Mychajliw.

Amongst the concerns of Social Services employees shared with the Office of Erie County Comptroller include, but are not limited to:

- Lack of available space to properly socially distance
- Lack of plastic shields/guards
- Concerns over proper sanitation of common office areas
- Lack of formal plans for those who interact with the public and clients
- Lack of guidance from the county as to how they will properly handle this ongoing pandemic
- The county's liability if workers contract Coronavirus and it is spread to healthy family members
- If work is getting done remotely, why return workers to an environment where it will be easy to contract COVID-19

"I keep referring to the old saying 'if it isn't broke, don't fix it. I think the world of our union employees. They've done an incredible job getting their work done remotely. Why bring them back to an unsafe work environment when the county doesn't have to. It is time to accept the fact that the workplace as we know it has changed, permanently and for the better. I pledge to work with anyone to keep our employees safe and healthy," said Comptroller Mychajliw.

The Comptroller says other private and public employers, including the City of Buffalo, are continuing remote work measures, and the Erie County workforce needs guidance from the Administration, which to this point has been lacking.

"It doesn't appear the County is prepared to re-open fully next week. Even the County Executive and Health Commissioner said the public is still at risk. If that is true, then that means county workers are, as well. They are worried about their health and safety," concluded Comptroller Mychajliw.

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