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COMPTROLLER’S OFFICE REVIEWS COVID OVERTIME HOURS FOR ADMINISTRATION’S TOP COMMISSIONERS

Analysis raises more questions than answers pertaining to the electronic swipes and calendars of Commissioners that submitted information to the Erie County Legislature

(ERIE COUNTY, NY) – Erie County Comptroller Stefan I. Mychajliw, Jr. provided to the Erie County Legislature a further breakdown of overtime costs for two of the Administration’s top commissioners, as lawmakers continue to analyze the high amounts of overtime paid to some managerial confidential, salaried employees. Political appointees normally do not receive overtime pay.

Calendars and only the times of electronic swipes, not the exact location of those swipes, were submitted to the Erie County Legislature by Erie County Health Commissioner Dr. Gale Burstein and Emergency Services Coordinator Daniel Neaverth.

COVID-19 has impacted Erie County worse than other areas. Currently, Erie County’s death rate compared to the total number of diagnosed cases of COVID-19 is 8.1%. This rate is higher than New York State’s 6.1% rate and more than double the United States’ 3.5% rate. While the number of cases and deaths rose, the county dedicated significant resources to address this continuing pandemic. A letter sent to the County Legislature takes a closer look at user swipes, calendars, and other information for two commissioners involved with addressing this crisis.

“The overtime information provided to the Legislature raises more questions than answers. The data given to lawmakers omitted important information, like the exact location of where workers were when they electronically swiped in to start the work day. Some of that information was incomplete. Some calendar information does not correspond to electronic swipe records. There could be plausible explanations for this. We don’t know. At this time, the Legislature does not have answers since their Committee meeting on COVID-19 overtime was postponed,” said Erie County Comptroller Stefan I. Mychajliw Jr.

The Comptroller’s Office review included two spreadsheets that allows lawmakers to view the total hours of appointments on calendars that were publicly submitted and the total hours electronically swiped in for Commissioners Burstein and Neaverth.

Unfortunately, the spreadsheet does not provide answers to many questions lawmakers may have. The incomplete information provided by the County Executive may raise more issues and concerns. Such questions may include:

- Why did Commissioner Neaverth swipe in and/or out at Chestnut Ridge 142 times, and at the Public Safety Building in downtown Buffalo two times, the Rath Building two times and the Fire Academy one time in Cheektowaga?
- Does it have anything to do with the proximity of Chestnut Ridge to his home and that it is only a .75-mile detour to the park on his commute downtown?
- Was there an attempt to use the swipe system's multiple locations to increase the number of hours claimed for work per week?
- There are many meetings on Commissioner Neaverth's calendar that seem to be repeating events. Did these meetings all occur and did the Commissioner participate? There appear to be several meetings that he swiped out at Chestnut Ridge shortly after the meeting started. There are items on the calendar that likely didn't occur, such as the MSG Home Feed of the Sabres game on March 13, which is after the league paused. Did the Commissioner attend meetings in Chicago or Indianapolis, which are on his calendar?
- Commissioner Neaverth has a number of "private appointments" for which he was swiped in for, and/or also had other meetings scheduled during the private appointment. What is the accurate account of what was done for work on those days?
- When was the Commissioner quarantined for COVID-19? Did this impact his attendance at any of these calendared meetings? Did he swipe in during his quarantine time?
- The first and last recurring daily meetings list the same individual on the meeting. She has collected a similar amount of overtime hours as the commissioner, but the hours are not accumulated the same way on a per week basis. Why is this?
- Commissioner Neaverth's calendar lists multiple meetings for certain time blocks. Were all of these meetings attended?
- The amount of time spent on calendared items does not match the swiped in hours. What was being done during the time that is unaccounted for?
- Accounting for time swiped in and calendar items, there are 219.29 hours unaccounted for. What did Commissioner Neaverth do during that time?
- Commissioner Burstein has a number of missed swipes, typically for the end of the day. Where were work days ended?
- Accounting for time swiped in and calendar items, there are 265.31 hours unaccounted for. What did Commissioner Burstein do during that time?

"If the Legislature chooses, our office is happy to review electronic swipes and timesheets of all employee overtime that was billed to COVID. While only two Poloncarz Administration political appointees submitted information, many more did not. I would encourage the Legislature to schedule their public meeting soon so questions can be answered about COVID overtime. Seeking answers on how taxpayer dollars are spent is a good thing. Better to review this information now, rather than the federal government discover discrepancies years down the road," concluded Comptroller Mychajliw.

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