



# STEFAN I. MYCHAJLIW

## ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER

December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020 – For immediate release  
Contact – Office of Erie County Comptroller, 858-8400

### **COUNTY WELFARE FRAUD INVESTIGATORS FORCED TO BECOME COVID-19 CONTACT TRACERS**

*Social Services employees that investigate welfare fraud expressed concerns about being forced to return to the Rath Building, where bedbugs live and COVID cases have spread*

**(ERIE COUNTY, NY)** – Erie County Social Services Welfare Fraud Investigators, most of whom have been working remotely, contacted the Office of Erie County Comptroller’s Whistleblower Hotline to express serious concerns about their forced reassignment to become Contact Tracers for the Department of Health.

Their many issues, which have been shared with the Department of Personnel, stem from not only being forced to work in different job titles but having to physically work in the Rath Building. Prior to being forced to become Contact Tracers, these Department of Social Services’ Special Investigations Division (SID) workers did their jobs remotely. Now they have expressed health concerns, especially with COVID-19 outbreaks taking place in the Rath Building, where bed bug infestations were also prevalent.

“These welfare fraud investigators were told to work from home because of safety concerns. Now they are ordered back into county buildings at a time when COVID cases are on the rise. Why was it not safe enough for them to come to work before, but now it is?”

“Forcing employees to work out of title and having them work alongside other county employees in the Rath Building makes no sense. This raises the risk of spreading COVID-19 even more amongst the workforce. These employees state they are troubled by lack of social distancing, air quality and meaningless safety measures,” said Comptroller Stefan Mychajliw.

The Comptroller cited numerous recent cases of COVID outbreaks among county workers and in county buildings as reasons for concern among employees. In a letter to Personnel Commissioner Timothy Hogues, Comptroller Mychajliw questioned why training for contact tracing is not being done remotely.

In addition, the many employees that reached out to the Comptroller’s Office said they were told they would be able to work remotely once training is complete, but that has not happened.

“It makes no sense to expose our workers to COVID risks. Our union employees need to be heard. They need to be listened to. Their concerns need to be taken seriously,” concluded Comptroller Mychajliw.

###