



# STEFAN I. MYCHAJLIW

## ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER

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### **COUNTY PAID ALMOST \$6 MILLION IN SALARIES FOR EMPLOYEES NOT TO WORK DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

*Even more surprising: some employees were paid not to work and still collected overtime in same pay period*

**(ERIE COUNTY, NY)** – Erie County Comptroller Stefan I. Mychajliw, Jr. submitted a report to the Erie County Legislature outlining the number of Erie County employees who were told not to report to work, yet still received full-time pay. Beginning March 17, 2020, the Poloncarz Administration implemented a policy where some employees deemed “essential” continued to work on-site full time. Other employees worked some days on-site while working remotely other days. Some deemed “non-essential” or were unable to complete assignments remotely, were told to stay at home, without working.

In these latter cases, employees continued to receive full-time pay. The total amount paid to these employees not to work is \$5,863,284. In some cases, county employees collected paychecks for staying at home while also being paid overtime in the same pay period.

“We faced an unprecedented pandemic. I wholeheartedly understand that. Like the situation or not, our report analyzed the amount paid to employees to sit home and not work. That dollar figure was almost \$6 million. That’s a lot of money. What is not understandable is how one week some employees got full pay not to work, yet somehow the next week they were able to work and receive overtime pay.”

“How can you earn overtime one week yet be designated unable to work and receive full pay the week before? It makes no sense. I hope the Legislature addresses this issue when they hold their committee hearing on overtime pay for political employees,” said Comptroller Mychajliw.

There was a total of 2,468 employees who logged 274,258 hours not working but getting paid from March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020 to present. The report found the majority of those employees were from the Erie County Public Library, Department of Social Services, the Department of Public Works, Clerk and the Sheriff’s Office.

It is important to note, however, that libraries and auto bureaus were closed during much of the pandemic.

Two high level political appointees were paid to sit home and not work for some periods, including the Erie County Attorney and the Medicaid Inspector General.

In the case of the Medicaid Inspector General, he is one of the 38 employees that was paid not to work one week, then the next week, all within the same pay period, worked and collected overtime charged to the federal COVID-19 fund. In the case of the Medicaid Inspector General this occurred in three separate pay periods.

“That could be quite confusing to taxpayers footing the bill for this. One week you are not able to work and get full pay, then all of a sudden, in the span of a week, you’re able to work and collect overtime? In government there seems to be a second set of rules for hard working union employees and highly paid political appointees,” said Comptroller Mychajliw.

The Poloncarz Administration decided to send some Erie County workers home not to work with full pay at the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Confusion kicked off the process on March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020. At first employees were ordered to enter a code titled “Emergency Closing” while submitting their payroll records/timesheets. This specific code allowed workers to still accumulate sick and vacation time while technically not working.

On April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the Poloncarz Administration switched the personnel code employees were to submit if getting paid but not working: “Unutilized Time.” This still allowed workers to get paid not to work, but did stop the accumulation of sick and vacation time if the employee logged more than 40 hours of unutilized time in the pay period.

“Our union employees are not to blame. They did nothing wrong. It was not their fault that they couldn’t report to work. That being said, it is important taxpayers have a full understanding of how their tax dollars are spent, regardless of how people feel about government workers sitting home, not working and getting paid,” said Comptroller Mychajliw.

One of the recommendations of the report to the Erie County Legislature is for the County of Erie to begin negotiations immediately with all bargaining units to create a new, permanent policy pertaining to remote working. The Office of Erie County Comptroller recommends the County of Erie implement a permanent work from home policy that will allow some employees to work remotely, while still having some employees report to their respective workplaces because of the nature of their jobs.

“I think the world of our union employees. They are getting the job done remotely under difficult circumstances. If the risk of contracting COVID-19 is so serious as claimed by the Poloncarz Administration, they should rush to the negotiating table to create a permanent remote workplace policy. The City of Buffalo is doing this. So too should the County of Erie,” concluded Comptroller Mychajliw, who has already met personally with CSEA President Denise Szymura and AFSCME President Rich Canazzi to explore the possibility of a permanent remote workplace policy.

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