



# STEFAN I. MYCHAJLIW

## ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER

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## **COUNTY EMPLOYEES CONTINUE SHARING CONCERNS OVER COVID-19 WORK ENVIRONMENT**

*Comptroller Mychajliw continues fight to allow employees to work remotely, as even more workers come forward with concerns over cleanliness of county buildings*

**(ERIE COUNTY, NY)** – Erie County Comptroller Stefan Mychajliw reported a spike in the number of CSEA Local 815 union employees contacting the Office of Erie County Comptroller, to report retribution for making public concerns about the safety of working remotely and the conditions of the Rath Building and other county buildings.

Many employees in the Social Services Department reached out to Comptroller Mychajliw about their health and safety due to some being forced back into close, confined spaces in the Rath Building. Some also claimed they faced retribution in the workplace for contacting the Comptroller's Office and for making their concerns public.

"I get the feeling some employees feel abandoned by their union. Some feel union leadership will do anything the County Executive tells them to do. The treatment of the employees CSEA represents is a concern to me. Unfortunately, it appears the same cannot be said for some that collect their hard-earned money via union dues. I cannot be any more direct: many CSEA workers want the union to fight for them the same way I am to continue working remotely. Many feel the union is being pushed around by the administration and folding to them like a house of cards," said Comptroller Mychajliw.

In yet another correspondence sent to CSEA Local 815 President Denise Szymura today repeating concerns about the health and safety of the county workforce returning to work at county buildings. This comes after more employees reached out to the Comptroller, expressing their anxieties that some of the safety measures the Administration told them would be put in place have not yet been implemented, and if they say anything, they're disciplined.

Here are concerns expressed by one employee in the Social Services Department, which was included in the correspondence to the CSEA Local 815 President:

EMPLOYEE #1: *I had previously emailed you with concerns about returning to work at the Rath building. Originally we were told that we had to pick one of the days assigned to us for onsite work. Apparently this was not made clear in the most recent email and several of us did not report to the building for work today and are working virtually from home. Supervisors have contacted us saying that we were to be there today and because we didn't show up this morning, we would need to use our own time off even though we were working remotely all morning. This is absurd and it wasn't made clear, we are working from home and now being told to use our time while working. To top it off it has come to our attention that supervisors are only required to come into the building two days per week while we are required to come in three days. Is their health and safety more important than ours? I'm not sure how this is fair. Also they have not given us any resolutions to our child care needs. I appreciate you standing up for us and hopefully we can reach some type of resolution to make this safe and manageable for everyone.*

“The safety of our workforce is my number one priority,” said Comptroller Mychajliw. “These hard-working employees are worried about their health in the midst of a global pandemic. Meanwhile, it appears the workers who have expressed their fears are now being punished for speaking up. Let them continue working remotely. They are getting a tremendous amount of work done under difficult circumstances,” added Comptroller Mychajliw.

The additional emails/complaints received by the Office of Erie County Comptroller were fairly consistent in that most advocated for a permanent policy to allow employees to work remotely.

EMPLOYEE #2: *“There is nothing I do in the office I can't do at home. I am finding I get more work done at home due to less interruptions. I used my own high speed internet, my own PC and my own cell phone. I like others am not asking for compensation, I am advocating for a permanent partial work from home scenario.”*

EMPLOYEE #3: *“I don't dare go to my Commissioner and complain because I'm sure I will end up on the layoffs when the budget is being done for 2021. But this building is disgusting. We have no one taking out the garbages. The floor in the office hasn't been cleaned since before the shut down. I'm not a germaphobe but this is bad. The clean the floors where the media will be but that is it. Bathrooms are not clean. So I can only imagine the germs going around. Why are we back 100% when no one else is? I can do my job 100% from home. Actually I worked harder because I did work all the time at home. Not just 8 hours. Whenever I had down time - because my laptop was right there - I would jump on and do clean up, answer emails that came in late and just kept up all the time. I don't understand why no one else cares about the employees.”*

“The emails tell stories of how they're being forced to use paid time off even though they actually were working. The employees are still managing to get their work done. Many say they are even more productive working from home. And they're staying safer in the process,” said Comptroller Mychajliw.

The Comptroller first sent a letter to CSEA Local 815 Union President Szymura on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020. It outlined his concerns and the need to continue working remotely.

“I'm fighting for union employees. Their own union is not. Workers deserve our respect. If they have concerns about their safety, the union and county should listen to them,” concluded Comptroller Mychajliw.

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