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Legislator :

As you are aware the Erie County Community Corrections Advisory Board has been meeting since February of 2011. Over the past year we have toured both the Erie County Holding Center and the Correctional Facility; reviewed security, medical, and mental health procedures; heard from various politicians and community advocates; and reviewed the order of dismissal from the Department of Justice's law suit against the county.

Throughout this process, several themes emerged as areas where significant improvements could be made for the betterment of staff and inmates alike. The committee has worked hard to come to a consensus on concrete recommendations that we feel could improve the outcomes within the Holding Center and Correctional Facility. We are now offering the Legislature three areas where we feel substantial changes could be made.

Despite a major overhaul of medical and mental health policy and procedures, staff remain hindered by a lack of timely access to arrested individuals medical and mental health information. To this end, the committee recommends the formation of a "medical hotline" which would allow family members and associates of newly arrested individuals to quickly provide medical and psychiatric information electronically and/or via phone/fax. This would provide vital information to assist in the medical and psychiatric screening processes and improve initial continuity of medications and other treatments.

Inmate programming within both facilities is limited, particularly within the correctional facility. Increased programming focused on welfare and rehabilitation would improve inmate satisfaction and potentially reduce recidivism. The committee recommends exploring partnerships with local behavioral health and educational agencies to increase programming in the areas of substance abuse treatment, vocational training, reentry planning, and post release employment

Finally, as per the committee's resolution previously submitted to the legislature and accompanying this letter, we recommend the creation of a new position of ombudsman to field future community and inmate complaints and concerns as well to allow an independent and local mechanism to review improvements within these facilities. While several additional layers of oversight have been created within this system, none of these are directly accessible to the community at large.

The members of the Erie County Community Correctional Advisory Board would welcome any chance to further discuss the above recommendations.

Respectfully submitted

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