



NEWS FROM THE OFFICE OF ULSTER COUNTY COMPTROLLER

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COMPTROLLER ISSUES STAFF AND CAPACITY AUDIT OF OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF CORRECTIONS DIVISION

Kingston, NY (August 13, 2020) – Ulster County Comptroller March Gallagher released an audit of the inmate capacity and staffing of the Ulster County Office of the Sheriff's Corrections Division. The Corrections Division represents 7% of the total Ulster County budget.

The Ulster County Law Enforcement Center was built for a large population licensed for a maximum facility capacity of 458 inmates. Prior to bail reform reductions in crime rates led to a declining inmate population. In 2018, average daily census averaged 280 inmates. In 2019, average daily inmate census averaged 217. In 2020, the average daily census has dropped to 122. Declining inmate populations have seen no commensurate reductions in staffing or costs. Mandated staffing, set by the NYS Commission on Corrections in 2012, remains at 158. Actual costs also have continued to increase year over year by 4% from 2017 through 2019.

"The numbers are so dramatic that as your County Comptroller, I felt a responsibility to bring these expenses into view. Ulster County faces severe revenue shortfalls requiring us to examine every expense for efficiencies as Ulster County faces gut wrenching 2021 budget decisions," said Ulster County Comptroller March Gallagher. "It's a shame that Ulster County did not request changes to capacity and staffing when inmate populations began to decline in 2017 and 2018."

The audit found larger than necessary maximum facility capacity, minimum staffing requirements and contracts for healthcare and food services. The Comptroller's Office recommends that Ulster County petition the state to bring the facility capacity and staffing in line with community need using pre-bail reform census numbers if necessary. Contracts for healthcare services and food services, based on average daily censuses of 310 and 325, should be renegotiated.

The Comptroller's Office also found that the Sheriff's Annual Report to the Ulster County Legislature understated expenses by \$4.8 million because the report was prepared prior to accounting for all year-end expenses. This caused the report to erroneously claim a decrease in expenses of 8.49% compared to the prior year when, in fact, 2019 expenses increased by 5.83% over 2018.

The audit also found that building maintenance and utilities, interest on debt service, insurance and workers compensation for the UCLEC facility are budgeted in other departments resulting in an understatement of the true cost of operation of the facility of at least \$2.28 million.

"Ulster County taxpayers continue to fully fund a large facility for an inmate service population that never met the maximum and has continued to decline since 2014 while costs have escalated," said Ulster County Comptroller March Gallagher. "Savings will allow the prioritization of other non-mandated services like the Sheriff's Road Patrol."

Ulster County faces pandemic related shortfalls in budgeted revenue of between \$30 and \$40 million. The County Executive called for a 10% budget cut across all departments and the County Legislature has reduced legislative programs spending.

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Report attached and available at <https://comptroller.ulstercountyny.gov/audit-reports>