



# **NEWS**

## **RENSSELAER COUNTY LEGISLATURE**

### **Office of the Minority 270-2892**

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Members of the Democratic Minority of the Rensselaer County Legislature presented their proposal for minimizing the cost to taxpayers for the expansion for County Jail.

The legislators requested that the County Executive and Legislative Majority agree to submit a shared services grant application to the state to study the feasibility of converting the McGregor or Hudson state correctional facilities into a regional facility for counties. "The State is planning to close these state facilities at the same time we are being mandated to expand our jail. We believe there is an opportunity here for intergovernmental cooperation that will save taxpayers money and also benefit the local economy," stated Minority Leader Ginny O'Brien.

For several years Rensselaer County has been under orders from the State Commission on Correction to expand its jail. The State has issued temporary variances permitting the County to double-bunk its inmates but the county has still been spending \$1.5 million each year to house prisoners in other counties. The Rensselaer County Jail expansion is estimated to cost \$50 million to add 196 beds to the existing jail. After the expansion is implemented and the variances are removed, there will be a net gain of only 27 beds, however. "We need to start looking at alternatives now or we'll have to go back to taxpayers for money to expand the jail again," said Legislator Kevin Harrington, a member of the Legislature's Judiciary Committee.

One alternative would be to convert one of the State facilities slated for closure to a regional facility that could handle inmates with substance abuse issues or mental illness. "By addressing these subpopulations, we may be able to reduce recidivism, which would reduce crime and jail populations in the long run. Our discussions with the State have indicated that they would be supportive of this kind of proposal," stated Legislator Brian Zweig.

"There is already a model for such a regional facility in the regional juvenile detention facility. This is an excellent opportunity to explore how we can save costs down the road through a regional approach to housing inmates. Counties cannot continue to foot skyrocketing correctional costs alone," said Legislator Flora Fasoldt. In addition, Assemblymen Roy MacDonald (R) representing Saratoga County and Tim Gordon (I) representing Columbia County have publicly expressed support for the reuse of the two state correctional facilities.

Legislators met recently with state officials who were receptive to the Democrats' idea to study the feasibility of re-using state correctional facilities for a regional jail facility. The state suggested the shared services program as a means to fund such a feasibility study. Any grant application from the county will need the cooperation of County Executive Kathy Jimino and approval from the Legislature.

"Many state and local elected officials have complained about this issue. We have worked to come up with a viable alternative that creates a win-win for the State, Counties and most of all, the taxpayers of Rensselaer County," noted Deputy Minority Leader Keith Hammond.

The Rensselaer County Legislature is scheduled to vote on bonding an additional \$12.5 million for the jail expansion at its monthly meeting Tuesday night. The Democratic Minority will be asking for the support of the County Executive and the Legislative Majority for their proposal as part of the plan for moving forward with the expansion of the County Jail.