



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### Highlights of the **March 19, 2013** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Citizens Speak Out on New York SAFE Act; Legislators Call Special Public Safety Meeting Next Week to Examine the Issue**

The Tompkins County Legislature listened to nearly three hours of public comment regarding the New York Secure Ammunition and Firearms Enforcement Act of 2013 (more commonly known as the SAFE Act), and decided to examine the issue at a special meeting of its Public Safety Committee next week before weighing in on the new law, which prompted comments both against and in support before Legislators tonight.

At what may have been a record in recent history for public turnout and comment before the Legislature, more than 200 citizens turned out, filling the Legislature Chambers and overflowing into the Main Courtroom at the County Courthouse. Of them, 59 people spoke—about two thirds (37) urging repeal of the Act and about one-third (22) in support. Opponents faulted both the new law itself— which they maintained is a misguided attempt that infringes upon law-abiding citizens' rights—and the way it was rushed through to passage without public input. They said it's time for Tompkins County to join nearly every other upstate county in opposing the law. Supporters said reasonable gun control measures are needed in New York State to reduce gun violence and, while the SAFE Act may not be perfect, it is a start. Legislator after legislator thanked those who turned out for their reasoned, passionate, and mutually respectful comments. Legislators praised it as a valuable and impressive educational session, and said they learned a lot.

A member-filed resolution from Legislator Dave McKenna, would put the Legislature on record opposing both the SAFE Act, which has imposed new regulations on gun possession and sales in New York State, and what it calls "the flawed process by which it was enacted and urges that it be replaced with "more sensible legislation." With Mr. McKenna's resolution and perhaps as many as four alternates in process advanced as potential alternatives and the volume of concerned public comment, Legislator Peter Stein, vice chair of the Public Safety Committee noted that "this is a very complicated issue, and I think it's very important for us to get it right," and he urged that the matter be referred to the Public Safety Committee to go through Legislature's normal committee process. Others agreed that's important for the sake of transparency and thorough examination, which many critics of the law said did not happen at the State level. The proposal to refer to committee was approved by a 10-3 vote, with Legislators McKenna, Frank Proto, and Public Safety Chair Brian Robison voting no, and Legislator Pam Mackesey excused.

Committee Chair Robison said it's important to move forward without delay so that the matter could come before the full Legislature at its next meeting. The special meeting is scheduled Wednesday, March 27, beginning at 4:00 p.m., location to be announced. Robison said, "I am hopeful that this does not in the end turn out to be a partisan issue, because this is not a partisan issue. We are going to vote on this issue, one way or another."

*Contact: Legislator David McKenna, 564-7243; Brian Robison, Chair, Public Safety Committee, 351-3601.*

#### **Bonding Authorized for Cayuga Medical Center Improvements**

The Legislature, by unanimous vote (Legislator Pam Mackesey was excused), approved issuance by Cayuga Medical Center at Ithaca of up to \$25 million in tax-exempt revenue bonds by the Tompkins County

Development Corporation to support facility improvements at Cayuga Medical Center at Ithaca. The bonds, which carry no indebtedness to the County, will support improvements to the medical center's main campus, including expansion and redesign of the hospital's surgical center, pathology and laboratory, and obstetrics and gynecology departments, as well as other improvements and associated acquisition of equipment there and at the hospital's urgent care center. The tax-exempt bonding, which must be approved by the Legislature under state law, gives non-profit entities access to tax-free financing under the federal Internal Revenue Code.  
*Contact: Will Burbank, Chair, Economic Development Committee 272-7555.*

### **Ben Stewart Recognized as Distinguished Youth**

The Legislature recognized Ithaca High School sophomore Ben Stewart as this month's recipient of the Tompkins County Distinguished Youth Award. Nominated by Ithacan Larry Roberts, Ben is especially recognized for his commitment to the AIDS Ride for Life. First seeking to participate in the AIDS Ride three years ago, when he was informed that age restrictions would prevent his participation, Ben worked proactively with event organizers to adjust event protocols to address appropriate safety concerns and opened the door for more youth riders to participate, raising money for the Southern Tier AIDS Program (STAP). In 2011 and 2012, he rode the full 100-mile course, as one of the youngest riders to participate, was chosen in 2011 to wheel the "riderless bike" at the start of the ride, has raised more than \$2,000 for STAP, and recently was asked to serve on the AIDS Ride Planning Committee. Roberts' nomination letter calls Ben "a role model for his peers demonstrating what it can look like to support a cause which ones supports," and states that his commitment reminds the community of the ongoing need of support and services for those living with AIDS and the responsibility that all must share to support AIDS services in this community. The Distinguished Youth Award is cosponsored by A&B Awards and Engraving, Bangs Ambulance Service, Purity Ice Cream, and Cayuga Radio Group.

*Contact: Legislature Office, 274-5434.*

Among other actions, the Legislature

- Authorized that \$400,000 in Federal Small Cities Community Development Block Grant funds be granted to Better Housing for Tompkins County to continue the County's Homeownership Program, a program it has administered since its inception. The funds will assist approximately 11 county families in becoming first-time homeowners.
- Repeated its action to request authorization to extend the additional 1% local sales tax rate in Tompkins County, which expires in November of this year. The Legislature already requested the extension late last year, but has since been informed that the request must be filed in the 2013 calendar year.
- Held a public hearing on proposed amendments to the Tompkins County Code, Chapter 32-Code of Ethics. There was no public comment. The hearing precedes the Legislature's future consideration of a Local Law that would amend the Code of Ethics to implement the changes. The proposed revision is the product of many months of review and study by the County's Ethics Advisory Board and the Legislature's Government Operations Committee,
- Accepted two grants: a more than \$21,000 grant awarded the Department of Probation and District Attorney's Office by the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services to help defray the costs of implementing Leandra's Law and the monitoring of ignition interlock devices, and \$8,600 in federal funds awarded the Department of Social Services through the State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance for computer software to improve delivery and reporting of homelessness case management services.

**- END -**