



Inclusion Through Diversity

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TWO PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **June 17, 2014** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Supports Rural Public Transit Through Reform of Non-Emergency Medicaid Transportation

Acting on a resolution initiated by Legislator Dan Klein, the Legislature, by unanimous vote, expressed the Legislature's strong support of rural public transit, in light of the impact of changes in New York State changes in managing and funding non-emergency Medicaid transportation, and urged the State to provide the financial support necessary to preserve these important services.

Noting that Medicaid funding for non-emergency transportation represents a substantial portion of the funding stream of public bus systems for many rural upstate counties, the measure states that last fall's change by the State in how it manages and funds Medicaid transportation has resulted in drastic decreases in revenue for many nearby counties, and that Tioga, Schuyler, and Cortland Counties' bus service to Tompkins County is threatened by this loss of revenue.

The Legislature asks the State Department of Health to recognize the considerable public benefits of rural public transit services to Medicaid clients and others in rural areas; to expend allocated state aid to rural transit providers expeditiously to forestall severe service reductions; and to provide ongoing support for rural public transit providers. The measure also asks the State to pay rates for Medicaid patients' use of rural public transit services that represent the full cost of providing the service, and encourages the Governor and Legislature to restart the state interagency coordinating committee on rural public transportation to enable new public policies to be implemented to increase public benefits and avoid collateral damage to rural public transportation services.

Mr. Klein said he had advanced the matter directly to the Legislature to permit action before the State Legislature session adjourns later this week. Health and Human Services Chair Peter Stein had said the measure should be sent to committee for review, maintaining there's no chance it would be considered before end of session. Both Legislators Martha Robertson and Jim Dennis said it's important to raise the visibility of the issue now, even if it has to be raised again later. Chair Mike Lane said that, even though the County is not directly affected, it is important to take the stand to show solidarity with neighboring rural counties.

Contact: Legislator Dan Klein, 272-7582.

Legislature Supports Ending Pharmacy Tobacco Sales

The Legislature joined the Tompkins County Board of Health in expressing support of ending the sale of tobacco products in all pharmacies and stores that contain a pharmacy department. The vote was 12-2, with Legislators Dan Klein and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne voting no. Calling tobacco products "highly addictive" and responsible for the preventable death of thousands of people in the state each year, the resolution approved by the Legislature maintains that sale of such harmful products by pharmacies and providers of health care represents a conflict of interest. The measure notes that, according to a consultant's survey last year, more than half of adult residents of Tompkins County believe pharmacies should not be allowed to sell tobacco products; that a majority of pharmacists are opposed to pharmacies selling tobacco; and that Attorneys General of 28 states and territories, including New York, believe that removing tobacco products from stores that contain a pharmacy would be a "step forward in keeping tobacco products away from youth" and preventing youths from starting to smoke.

Public Health Director Frank Kruppa said that the resolution does not have any statutory or legal authority, but is an educational message to encourage pharmacies to not sell tobacco. Both Health and Human Services Chair Peter Stein and Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera observed that over the years they believe small steps like this have effects on behavior. Legislator Dooley Kiefer inquired whether the County might pass a law to regulate such sales if it desired. County Attorney Jonathan Wood said he didn't know of another municipality that has done that. Legislator Klein said he believes pharmacies sell a lot of unhealthy items, such as soda and candy bars, and that he believes eliminating sales at pharmacies would not change the number of people who smoke, but just where people buy tobacco products.

Contact: Peter Stein, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee, 266-7579; Legislator Dan Klein, 272-7582.

Grant Application Authorized to Extend Home Rehabilitation Program

The Legislature, by unanimous vote, authorized the County to apply for up to \$400,000 in New York State Community Renewal funding, under the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program to continue the Tompkins County Healthy Homes Rehabilitation Program. The program addresses the energy, health, and safety concerns of low-to-moderate income residents through energy and air quality, and water and septic improvements in homes. The program, operated through Better Housing for Tompkins County, would expand the home rehabilitation program, which operated from 2011-2013. The funding would provide rehabilitation for 23 households, with household income within the program requirements, with the need-based grants of up to \$25,000 awarded.

Contact: Carol Chock, Chair, Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality Committee, 273-9007; Megan McDonald, Senior Planner, Tompkins County Planning Department, 274-5560.

Katherine Marte Recognized as Tompkins County Distinguished Youth

Ithaca High School senior Katherine Marte is recognized as this month's Tompkins County Distinguished Youth. Nominated by high school graduation coach Micheryl Blake, Katherine is recognized as an outstanding student and an all-round athlete (three-sport varsity athlete for the past three years), who serves as a positive role model, an active and dedicated community volunteer, and an individual who possesses a strong determination to succeed. Volunteer service includes the Cayuga Nature Center, Ithaca Festival, Cass Park, and the Northside Community Center, as well as hosting a basketball clinic as a fundraiser for the fight against cancer—all these achievements occurring while also working at Wegmans since 2012.

Ms. Blake's nomination letter states: "Katherine's all around abilities convinced me to nominate her this esteemed award—meeting challenges with great success, and being a responsible young lady who is focused towards a clear path in life. Katherine has demonstrated daily what it means to be distinguished. Katherine always balances her time between school, sports and work, and still manages to help anyone who needs assistance. Katherine has always done her extreme best, and worked to greatly improve her own confidence in her abilities...She will make a great student leader as she progresses, and I have no doubts that her abilities and determination will continue to grow."

The Distinguished Youth Award is cosponsored by Specialty Trophy & Awards, Bangs Ambulance, Purity Ice Cream, and Cayuga Radio Group.

Contact: Legislature Office, 274-5434.

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