



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **March 17, 2015** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Passage of Anti-Solitary Confinement Legislation Urged

The Legislature, by unanimous vote (Legislator Nate Shinagawa was excused) urged the New York State Assembly and Senate to pass The Humane Alternatives to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act, as recommended by the Legislature's Public Safety; Budget, Capital, and Personnel; and Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Committees. The HALT bill, as described in the resolution, essentially calls for the creation of alternatives to isolated confinement; states that no person may be held in isolated confinement more than 15 consecutive days, or 20 days total in any 60-day period; restricts criteria for placement in isolated confinement; and bans several special populations from isolated confinement.

Noting that a number of people in the community have been working on and proposing this, Budget/Personnel Chair Jim Dennis said, "It's time to do this...you have to do the right thing and pass this resolution." Legislator Mike Sigler, who supported the resolution, said before the vote that the legislation does not, and it not intended to address those in "super-max" incarceration facilities.

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 387-4058; Nathan Shinagawa, Chair, Public Safety Committee, 280-7557; Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, Chair, Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Committee, 277-5104.

Legislature Affirms Pine Tree Road Paths Project

The Legislature took action needed to preserve the Pine Tree Road Bike and Pedestrian Paths Project in the Town of Ithaca. By a vote of 11-2, Legislators voted to amend the Capital Program to increase the project cost to \$1,865,000 and appropriate more than \$196,000 from the Highway Fund Balance to support the project (Legislators Peter Stein and Dooley Kiefer voted no; Legislator Nate Shinagawa was excused).

The project is jointly funded by Tompkins County, Cornell University, and the Town of Ithaca, with the support of nearly \$1.2 million in State and Federal funding, and has been part of the County's Capital Program since 2009. It will build a 10-foot-wide, paved ADA-compliant path connecting existing sidewalks at Maple Avenue and East Hill Plaza to paths on Cornell's campus at the Pine Tree Road/NYS Route 366 intersection, and to the East Hill Recreation Way, to be carried over Pine Tree Road on a new pedestrian bridge to replace the existing railroad overpass. By creating separate pedestrian and bicycle facilities and widening of road shoulders at the old railroad overpass, the project is intended to provide safe and accessible accommodations for pedestrians, bicycles and motor vehicles.

The project was initially authorized at just over \$1.4 million; however, during the course of design, and in consultation with the Legislature, Cornell University and the Town of Ithaca, additional elements beyond the original plan—such as those to facilitate trail use by pedestrians and bicyclists, including individuals with disabilities—increased the cost by approximately \$400,000 over budget. To fill that gap and enable the project to go forward, Cornell has increased its project contribution by \$200,000, to \$400,000, and the Town of Ithaca has increased its contribution by \$35,000, to \$70,000. The County's contribution will increase from \$35,000 to just over \$196,000.

Contact: David McKenna, Chair, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee, 564-7243

Legislature Urges Delay in Changes to STAR Exemption

The Legislature reacted to a proposal in the coming year's State Budget to convert the STAR (School Tax Relief Program) real property tax exemption to a personal income tax credit, which as proposed would start with exemptions granted for the 2015 Assessment Roll—applications that have already been approved by the Department of Assessment. The Legislature, by unanimous (with Legislator Nate Shinagawa excused) petitioned the State to delay to a personal income tax credit for any STAR exemption legally granted after the 2015 Assessment Roll to allow the public to be more adequately informed of this important change in their taxes, as of the March 1, 2015 taxable status date. By delaying this desirable transition one assessment year, the measure states, the confusion, inconvenience, and financial anxiety for the taxpayer can be avoided.

Director of Assessment Jay Franklin called it “bad public policy to change the rules of the game” after the exemption has already legally been approved, and added that he recently learned that the proposal at this point has been removed from both Assembly and Senate budget bills.

Contact: Dan Klein, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 272-7582; Jay Franklin, Director of Assessment, 274-5517.

Legislature Hears About Aging Strategic Plan, Supports County Engagement in Age-Friendly Communities Network

County Office for the Aging Director Lisa Holmes delivered a presentation to Legislators on the Office's 2015 Strategic Plan for Aging in Tompkins County.

The Plan is posted on the County's website at

<http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/files/cofa/Strategic%20Plan%20for%20Aging%20in%20Tompkins%20County%203.9.15.pdf>.

As one of the next steps, and part of an ongoing, thoughtful, and collaborative planning process to strive to be a community that welcomes and supports people as they age, Director Holmes said her office will work with the County and City of Ithaca to designate the County and City as an “Age Friendly Community” with AARP and the World Health Organization, to formally engage stakeholders in continuous improvement. The Legislature, by unanimous vote, then passed a resolution voicing the County's support of initiatives and opportunities to engage in that “Age-Friendly Communities Network” of municipalities, encouraging and promoting public policies that support healthy aging.

Contact: Director Lisa Holmes, County Office for the Aging, 274-5482; Peter Stein, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee, 266-7579.

State Urged to Fully Fund County Costs Related to Raising Age of Criminal Responsibility to 18

The Legislature, by unanimous vote (Legislator Nate Shinagawa was excused), called upon the State Legislature to support the plan of the State Commission on Youth, Public Safety, and Justice that the age of criminal responsibility in New York State be raised from age 16 to age 18, to be phased in over a two-year period. But it urged that the Legislature enact legislation that “fully, permanently, and unambiguously obligates the State to pay for 100% of all new costs incurred by county Probation Departments and other county departments and agencies” as a result of that change, and also that language be included to set aside designated funds from which counties can draw upon, eliminating the need for counties to exceed the 2% tax cap.

Legislator Martha Robertson said, there's a lot of consensus that the policy is right—the idea is that this is an unfunded mandate, and what the State will consider the related costs. While not advocating that those younger than 18 should be in the adult system, Legislator Mike Sigler said he didn't want to have the fact lost that some of the crimes committed here are “horrific” and real people are harmed.

Contact: James Dennis, Vice Chair, Public Safety Committee, 387-4058.

Aidan Mackenzie Recognized as Distinguished Youth

The Legislature recognized Ithaca High School junior Aidan Mackenzie, of Brooktondale, as the latest Tompkins County Distinguished Youth, the award presented by Legislator Dan Klein, who recognized him for his academic, athletic, and community service achievements. A member of the HIS tennis team, Aidan is taking three Advanced Placement and two Honors classes, and attended a summer program at St. John's College in Annapolis, MD, studying documents that are the foundation of democracy, such as the US Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and Supreme Court decisions. Last year, he served with his church youth group on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic, helped in flood relief in for residents in Apalachin, and recently earned the rank of Eagle Scout, as his Eagle project designing and organizing construction of a deer fence around a planned garden at St. Catherine of Siena Church—the garden to be used by the Church Teen Youth Group to grow food for Loaves and Fishes.

The Distinguished Youth Award is co-sponsored by Bangs Ambulance Service, Specialty Trophy and Awards, Purity Ice Cream, and Cayuga Radio Group.

Contact: Legislature Office, 274-5434.

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