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*Inclusion Through
Diversity*

"Promoting excellence in County operations while respecting the needs of the people we serve."

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **August 18th, 2020** meeting of the
Tompkins County Legislature

Tompkins County Legislature Unanimously Approves an Appropriation from Contingent Funds to Contract with Cayuga Health System (CHS) for Continued COVID-19 Community Surveillance Testing

The Tompkins County Legislature unanimously voted (14-0) to appropriate funds to support ongoing community surveillance testing, contracted with Cayuga Health System (CHS). The resolution was moved by Martha Robertson (D-Dryden), and seconded by Anna Kelles (D-Ithaca). The agreement to contract for the testing includes the County seeking reimbursement from FEMA's disaster relief program. This arrangement is in response to insurance companies advising CHS that only medically necessary testing costs could be reimbursed.

Wide-scale testing will be made available for all Tompkins County residents at the CHS sampling site at the Ithaca Mall. Once the new surveillance testing system is operational the Tompkins County Health Department will notify the public. Employers or organizations requiring testing for their employees should contract directly with CHS and would not be eligible for this County-sponsored testing.

Following ongoing conversation and collaboration with CHS, Tompkins County Administrator Jason Molino proposed the arrangement and Tompkins County Public Health Director Frank Kruppa offered support, stating "Isolation, quarantine, and disease management are foundational, the only way we can continue to do that is through testing. We'd be taking steps backward if we were to reduce testing capacity in our community." Administrator Molino added that steps were taken to seek investment from New York State, but the State declined support and a local solution seeking reimbursement through FEMA was deemed the best path forward.

Legislator Shawna Black stated, "Right now is one of the hardest times for our County to spend a lot of money, but we can all see the benefits of testing in our community. I'm proud of our County for being able to offer this." Her sentiments were echoed by Legislator Robertson, stating, "Medically necessary testing criteria is very narrow, it's just the people who have a known exposure, are symptomatic, or pre-operative. There are a lot of people we are worried about not included in that. 40 of our 236 cases so far have been asymptomatic and we've been able to catch those cases through our testing program to-date." *Contact, Martha Robertson, Chair, Budget Capital and Personnel Committee 607-592-3119, Jason Molino, Tompkins County Administrator, 607-274-5551, Frank Kruppa, Tompkins County Public Health Director, 607-274-6674*

Among Other Business

Legislature Chairwoman Leslyn McBean-Clairborne read a proclamation celebrating women's struggle for equality and the right to vote, on the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The proclamation recognizes the history of women's suffrage, including that women of color did not secure voting rights until the Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965. The Legislature was joined by members of the League of Women Voters, including co-president Sally Grubb, who paid homage to Martha Van Rennselaer, Beverly J. Martin, Dorothy Cotton, Carolyn Peterson, Barbara Lifton, and other local women of note who contributed prominently to public affairs in our community. Grubb further remarked that 2020 is significant not only because of events from 100 years ago but those happening today – women serve as the presidents of all three local academic institutions and for the first time an African American woman leads the County Legislature. County Historian Carol Kammen joined in celebrating the momentous occasion but cautioned that while "1920 was a beautiful start," there is still much to be done in the name of full equality for women under the law, such as the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). . "What we are talking about is how the constitution treats individuals, and women in 1848 and women today want to be treated as their own persons, responsible for themselves. ... The ERA would guarantee equal rights for all Americans regardless of sex in terms of divorce, property, employment, and equal pay, and the right to our

own personhood.” Kammen finished with a plea to her colleagues to “Vote. It’s your voice, it’s your power, it’s a sign of your personhood as a citizen of the United States.”

Tompkins County Administrator Jason Molino and Public Health Director Frank Kruppa presented an update on the local COVID-19 response. Included in the update were data on testing completed to date by Cayuga Health System, recent announcements regarding reopening from community partners, and enforcement processes for social gatherings not adhering to guidelines on density, distance, or face coverings. The full timeline document can be found [here](#). *Contact, Jason Molino, Tompkins County Administrator, 607-274-5551, Frank Kruppa, Tompkins County Public Health Director, 607-274-6674*

The Tompkins County Human Rights Commission shared a statement in solidarity with Tompkins County residents pursuing racial justice and outlining recommendations supporting activities and policy changes. In developing this statement, which Legislator Black described as full of passion, education, and research, the 14 commissioners reached out to a cross-section of stakeholders, including numerous community partners, the Ithaca Police, Sheriff’s Department, and Department of Social Services to incorporate as many voices and viewpoints as possible in the final document. Legislator Anna Kelles (D-Ithaca) thanked the Commission, “It’s great that you’re breaking down barriers, building trust and having hard conversations without people going into their corners. I’m excited to see the work you do moving forward and thank you for the thoroughness of the statement.” *Contact, Dr. Kenneth Clarke, Director, Tompkins County Office of Human Rights, 607-277-4080*

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