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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 **March 2nd, 2021** meeting of the
Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Hears Presentation on Reimagining Public Safety Draft Report, Discusses Process & Recommendations

Tompkins County Legislators heard a presentation on the Reimagining Public Safety report drafted in response to New York State Executive Order 203. Tompkins County and the City of Ithaca collaborated on the draft report and engaged the Center for Policing Equity to help administer the process. County Administrator Jason Molino presented background information on the process, recommendations made in the report, and the proposed implementation process. Details on the process and the draft report can be found on the [Tompkins County website](http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov).

Molino shared that the purpose of Executive Order 203 was to develop strategies to reduce discrimination and eliminate racial inequities in policing, and to better address the needs of communities of color. He added that, "the recommendations made in the report reflect that lens."

The Collaborative worked with local researchers Dr. Belisa Gonzalez and Dr. Sean Eversley Bradwell to analyze community input and focus group data. Dr. Gonzalez and Eversley Bradwell joined the meeting to give background on the research, Dr. Gonzalez stated, "(based on the charge of the Executive Order) we really wanted to lift up those minoritized voices who don't typically get heard in these processes ... One of the things we heard in those focus groups was that people relayed everyday experiences with law enforcement that they felt dehumanized and stigmatized." Gonzalez continued by clarifying that this qualitative data revealed perspectives that traditional quantitative methods would not, matching the charge of Executive Order 203, adding "we see the themes from the focus groups reflected in many of the recommendations."

City of Ithaca Mayor Svante Myrick joined the meeting as well and spoke to the City's involvement and recommendations in the report, stating that the City's core recommendation is designed to "deliver a (City) department that gives more bodies to the public safety response in the City of Ithaca ... and have a more robust public safety response, a heavier investment on the City of Ithaca's part." Myrick continued by detailing that two types of response are proposed in the recommended department structure. Following a question by Legislator Martha Robertson (D-Dryden), Myrick also clarified that proposed "Community Solutions Workers" could work closely with Community Outreach Workers and Public Safety Workers but might respond in cases where armed officers are not necessary with backup as necessary from other public safety entities. Myrick continued that they would not supplant mental health professionals or other social workers, "You'd see a broader, happier, and much more engaged prescience from this new department, and a more diverse department."

Legislator Shawna Black (D-Ithaca) commented, "I'd like to thank those who've been most impacted by racial injustice for being a part of this process. I've met with concerned constituents and law enforcement over the past week and one thing everyone agreed on is this [current system] isn't working at all." Black continued, "What I've heard is that we need change."

Several Legislators asked that the County-related recommendations be the focus of discussion and consideration, inquiring on whether it would be appropriate to adopt or accept a report that includes recommendations for the City. Legislators also sought more information on the budget impacts of the recommendations and clarity on what the final vote will entail, and whether they will be adopting or accepting the report. Legislator Rich John (D-Ithaca), Chair of the Legislature's Public Safety Committee invited all members of the legislators to the next Public Safety Committee [meeting](#) on March 18th at 3pm, John also encouraged all Legislators to keep an open mind and to continue to consider the report as a collaborative effort with the City.

Following questions from Legislators, Molino clarified that the proposed Community Justice Center would help materialize and facilitate the outcomes identified in the report's recommendations. The skills that would be sought for dedicated staff to help implement the recommendations would include data analysis and project management.

Tompkins County Sheriff Derek Osborne joined the meeting and stated, "We have to keep our sights on what the focus really is here, to make sure we're providing public safety to everybody in Tompkins County including our marginalized communities." Osborne continued, "I know there's been mention of me being an elected official... and I certainly don't want that to be a hinderance in our ongoing communication regarding this process. We're going to disagree on things in the report and the best way to accomplish things that are recommended. I don't take this report as being an end-all, I'll be satisfied as long as I remain involved in the process moving forward with this report and these recommendations as we discuss and modify them as need be."

Undersheriff Jennifer Olin added a comment in the spirit of Women's History Month, "This County, under the leadership of Sheriff Osborne was the first County in New York State history to have a female Undersheriff," and continued by thanking Sheriff Osborne for giving her the opportunity to serve in that role.

Legislature Chairwoman Leslyn McBean-Clairborne reiterated the purpose of the executive order, "to address marginalized groups ... their interactions with our public safety systems have sometimes ended up with them being dead or wrongly imprisoned." She continued, "Let's not lose focus on who we're supposed to center in this. We respect our law enforcement who are doing things well, we see this report also talk about taking care of our law enforcement's wellness. At the same time, I can't help but think of Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*, when she says that 'that the one social group in America that people are allowed to hate are criminals.' Black and brown people reporting in these focus groups that they feel dehumanized is problematic and a big deal – we've got to do something about it. We're being asked to take a huge step to take a paradigm shift on how we practice public safety, so lives are not at risk – including our police officers."

McBean-Clairborne concluded by stating, "I hear people saying we want to make change, addressing issues of structural and systemic racism is not easy for anyone, not the victims, the perpetrators, or those trying to make change. We have to be committed to it and not run and hide when we can make real change. Even the small steps matter, I want to encourage all of us to keep an open mind and approach this with conviction."

Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Gives COVID-19 Response and Vaccinations Update

Tompkins County Administrator Jason Molino and Public Health Director Frank Kruppa updated the Legislature on the local COVID-19 response and vaccine rollout. Molino detailed the decreasing local case count and the recent increase in the number of vaccine doses made available for Tompkins County.

The County recently created a COVID-19 Vaccine Registry designed to assess demand in different eligible populations and allow the Health Department to communicate directly with eligible individuals when appointments are available. Individuals can also call 2-1-1 to get on the registry if they do not have internet access. The registry can be accessed on the Health Department's [website](#). Legislator Mike Lane (D-Dryden) acknowledged the County's work creating the registry and thanked staff for their efforts. Kruppa shared that over 8,500 individuals have signed up for the registry so far.

Kruppa outlined the race and ethnicity breakdown of Tompkins County residents to-date and state, "We can't compare this to our larger population, as this reflects those in our currently eligible groups. As this opens to all community members, we can make more direct comparisons to the general population."

A recently published timeline of vaccine distribution in Tompkins County can be found on the Health Department website [here](#).

A comprehensive document outlining the Tompkins County's COVID-19 response can be found [here](#). *Contacts: Jason Molino, Tompkins County Administrator, 607-274-5551; Frank Kruppa, Tompkins County Public Health Director, 607-274-6674*

Among Other Business

Tompkins County Administrator Jason Molino presented information on the proposed New York State Fiscal Year 2021-2022 Budget, including information provided by the New York State Association of Counties. Molino outlined the State's anticipated budget gaps, challenges facing Counties, and some preliminary details on the anticipated federal stimulus plan. Molino reminded Legislators that no County did worse than Tompkins in sales tax receipts in 2021 as compared to 2020, relaying the pandemic's dramatic impact on the County.

Molino cited local impacts of the State's budget as being diversion of local sales tax to the State, proposed cuts in aid for important local programs that prevent youth from becoming justice-involved, community college support changes, Civil Service reform, and FMAP reconciliation. Molino stated next steps as watching the federal relief bill, and preliminary planning discussions with the Budget, Capital, and Personnel committee. *Contact: Jason Molino, Tompkins County Administrator, 607-274-5551*

A resolution brought forth by Legislator Mike Sigler (R-Lansing) to support removal of the Governor's emergency powers related to the pandemic failed, as was a motion to refer the resolution to the Government Operations Committee. Legislators Sigler, Champion, McKenna, and Morrey voted in favor of the resolution.