

## **Highlights of the January 4, 2022 meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature**

### **Shawna Black Unanimously Elected as Chairwoman of the Tompkins County Legislature**

Legislator Shawna Black (D-Ithaca) was unanimously elected (14-0) to serve as Chairwoman of the Legislature for 2022. Black has been a Legislator since November 2017 and has chaired the Health and Human Services Committee for the past four years, and Vice Chair of the Legislature for the past two years. Black is the first openly LGBTQ+ person to chair the Tompkins County Legislature.

Her nomination was offered by Legislator Anne Koreman (D-Ulysses), who remarked “Shawna’s leadership skills were honed prior to this role, including as the Executive Director of a senior living facility. She skillfully and compassionately chaired Health and Human Services for over 4 years,” addressing issues such as homelessness, mental health, human rights, and public safety reform. Koreman added that Black, “manages conflicting challenges by being straightforward and is not afraid to say, ‘I don’t know.’ She is also in touch with the joys and challenges of raising a family, including in the difficult times of COVID-19.”

Black’s nomination was seconded by Legislator Mike Sigler (R-Lansing), who remarked on Black’s ability, “to grow so quickly to chair a committee and be a good legislator. She governs from a position of kindness, something that’s missing a lot in the world. If you govern from that position, you can create good policy.” Sigler added, “She is able to balance the needs of her constituents with the needs of the greater County, which is a large area with competing views and needs, she gets to a good middle ground and addresses those needs.”

Black accepted the nomination and role with gratitude. “As we embark on this upcoming year, we will continue to be challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic but will need to create a new normal moving forward.” Black’s stated goals included that Tompkins County will continue to be a leader in New York State for the local pandemic response, alternatives to incarceration, and shared services. Black added, “Tompkins County will continue to invest in our employees, with a salary study coming this year. Day in and day out they serve our community.” She added that the County will continue to prioritize equity and diversity in the organization’s workforce, highlighting the hiring and work of the Chief Equity and Diversity Officer and Team Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI), committing to leading “a workplace of choice where everyone feels welcomed.”

Black addressed the length of Legislature meetings, asking for mindfulness and respect from fellow Legislators, “to offer crisp comments as the best use of everyone’s time.” Black added that while the “state of the County address” will occur in the next meeting, 2021 committees will continue to meet as planned in January 2022 as goals and preferences from Legislators are developed. Black thanked her wife Margot and children for their support and sacrifices as she has assumed the role of Legislator.

### **Legislator Deborah Dawson Unanimously Elected as Vice Chair**

Legislator Deborah Dawson (D-Lansing), who has served as on the Legislature since 2018 and has most recently chaired the Budget, Capital, and Personnel Committee was unanimously elected as Vice Chair of the Legislature. Dawson was nominated by Legislator Amanda Champion (D-Ithaca), who shared that Dawson is “one of the hardest working people I know,” adding, “she is an advocate for numerous issues and not afraid to say what she thinks or own up to her mistakes or change her mind based on new information or evidence.” Champion added, “she will be even more of an asset to this Legislature as one of its leaders.” Dawson’s nomination was seconded by Legislator Rich John (D-Ithaca), who remarked on the most recent budget cycle chaired by Dawson, “we finished our budget on-time and in agreement.”

### **Five New Legislators Take Oath of Office**

All fourteen Tompkins County Legislators, including five new Legislators took their oath of office, offered by Tompkins County Clerk Maureen Reynolds. New Legislators shared introductions to colleagues and the community:

Veronica Pillar (D-Ithaca) serves District 2

Greg Mezey (D-Dryden) serves District 13

Lee Shurtleff (R-Groton) serves District 9

Randy Brown (R-Newfield) serves District 8

Travis Brooks (D-Ithaca) serves District 1

The full slate of all 14 Legislators can be found on the Legislature’s [website](#).

Interim Tompkins County Administrator Lisa Holmes extended her congratulations and welcome to new Legislators on behalf of the entire County Administration team.

### **Legislature Hears Bi-Weekly COVID-19 Update**

Tompkins County Public Health Director Frank Kruppa and Deputy County Administrator Amie Hendrix presented an update on the COVID-19 pandemic response. The update included a roundup of recent activities following a continued increase in cases and shifts in guidance from the federal and state governments. The presentation outlined recent guidance for individuals taking self-tests for COVID-19, and the form to report positive self-test results.

Kruppa offered an overview of where the community is at and where it is headed related to the pandemic, outlining the continued “transition from pandemic to an endemic state, which is happening more rapidly right now. Several things will feel different in our response in the coming days – this doesn’t mean that COVID is not still a risk – but the ways we respond to cases with isolation and quarantine is going to be shifting,” referencing the CDC and New York State guidance shifting to five days for quarantine and isolation if an individual is asymptomatic. Kruppa stated, “The reason that we’re making the shift (in isolation and quarantine period) is two-fold; the science tells us that the prime transition point with omicron is in the first five

days, before dropping off significantly. The other reason is our broader approach to isolation and quarantine - from the beginning of the pandemic we were using these tools to interrupt disease transmission but there's a challenge with Omicron being so easily and quickly transmitted – the effectiveness of isolation and quarantine are diminished.” Kruppa added that shifting to five days will taper off the nurses’ work with case investigations and contact tracing, clarifying that it doesn’t mean that isolation and quarantine aren’t still necessary for positive individuals and close contacts. Tompkins County will continue to educate the community on what to do if they are a contact or are symptomatic. With the new guidance, if someone tests positive, they must stay home for five days, Kruppa added that the County is asking schools and employers to support their students and employees with this new guidance.

Kruppa also gave an update on PK-12 education, sharing that the State has distributed thousands of self-tests through BOCES to help support returning to schools after the holiday break and that he continues to be in constant communication with BOCES and superintendents. Kruppa outlined why Tompkins County is not supporting “Test to Stay” guidance, in coordination with districts due to resource constraints, adding that the shifts in isolation and quarantine guidance will aid in successfully keeping kids in schools. “Test to stay” is a program for exposed individuals to continue to go to school during the quarantine period while receiving multiple tests.

### **Among Other Business**

Tompkins County Chief Equity and Diversity Officer Deanna Carrithers presented a detailed review of progress from the Reimagining Public Safety Collaborative. The report included a review of work done in 2021 and the approved plans in progress of implementation in 2022. Carrithers outlined the impending Community Justice Center, which will take on leading implementation of Reimagining plans and be led by Monalita Smiley as the inaugural Project Director of the Center. Legislature Chairwoman Shawna Black (D-Ithaca) thanked Carrithers for the update and the County’s work on Reimagining Public Safety.

Visit [www.publicsafetyreimagined.org](http://www.publicsafetyreimagined.org) for more information and opportunities to provide input and ideas on Reimagining Public Safety.