

## COUNTY OF ERIE

LOCAL LAW INTRO. NO. 4-1 -2025

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A Local Law amending Erie County Local Law 3 (2019) to provide for additional community participation on the Erie County Corrections Specialist Advisory Board.

The Legislature of the County of Erie hereby amends Local Law 3 (2019) as follows:

## SECTION 1. LEGISLATIVE INTENT AND OVERVIEW

It is the Erie County Legislature's intention to establish the Erie County Corrections Specialist Advisory Board (the "Advisory Board") to provide advice to, and oversight over the Erie County Sheriff Office's Jail Management Division which administers the Erie County Holding Center and the Erie County Correctional Facility.

In 2010 this Honorable Body created a Community Corrections Advisory Board ("CCAB") via legislative resolution following evaluation and investigation and a lawsuit by the U.S. Department of Justice against Erie County and the Erie County Sheriff deeming federal oversight of the Erie County Holding Center and Correctional Facility as necessary and in the public interest due to a myriad of issues at both facilities. The CCAB's purpose was "discussion of corrections facilities programs and services to offer suggestions and advice for the improvement of such programs at the Erie County Correctional Facility and the Erie County Holding Center." The Legislature also desired that the CCAB could help prevent further improper treatment at the facilities, and devise solutions to improve procedures and operations and provide a mechanism for oversight.

One of the major issues plaguing the Jail Management Division involves mentally-ill inmates and prisoners who may be suicidal or who are in need of treatment while detained. The Erie County Department of Mental Health is administratively responsible for planning, directing, coordinating, and monitoring programs of prevention, treatment and rehabilitation involving detainees with mental health and/or intellectual or developmental disabilities and substance abuse services.

Over the intervening years, the state's regulator over local jails, the New York State Commission of Correction, has issued a series of critical reports over the Holding Center and Correctional Facility due to inmate escapes from custody, facility conditions, assaults on prisoners, mental health and healthcare deficiencies, and the deaths of prisoners or detainees in the custody of the Erie County Division of Jail Management. This includes a February 2018 report entitled "The Worst Offenders Report: The Most Problematic Local Correctional Facilities of New York State", that labeled the Holding Center and Correctional Facility as one of the "worst offenders for being in violation of state law."

For a variety of reasons, the CCAB did not function as hoped and expected and in 2013 the CCAB functionally stopped meeting or acting and was not subsequently convened.

Section 2205 of the Erie County Charter states: "Advisory boards shall meet at least four times per year, and meetings shall be held in compliance with the Open Meetings Law. If a board fails to hold the minimum number of meetings, the creating authority shall investigate why, and is authorized to remove an ineffective chair or any inactive members, or to recommend that the legislature abolish the board.

Because the CCAB has not met since 2013, and due to the host of problems, issues and concerns over the Erie County Holding Center and Correctional Facility, it is recommended that the Legislature abolish the CCAB and create a new robust and inclusive corrections advisory board comprised of current and/or retired professionals who have expertise in criminal justice, public safety, restorative justice and reducing recidivism that will more effectively serve the people of Erie County.

The Advisory Board is intended to focus on restorative justice, serve as a bridge between the community, the Erie County Department of Mental Health, and the Erie County Sheriff's Office's Jail Management Division, and will be dedicated to enhancing the safety and conditions in the Erie County Holding Center and Correctional Facility. Its mission will be to bring leaders and professionals in our community together to help monitor and improve the County's correctional facilities, improve the lives of those who have left correctional facilities and reduce recidivism and help with re-entry to society, and work together for solutions to problems while continually looking for ways to improve internal operations and procedures in the correctional facilities.

Section 2205 of the Erie County Charter states: "Advisory boards shall consist of an odd number of members, at least seven and at most fifteen. Members shall be residents of Erie County."

The Erie County Legislature recognizes the significance of community involvement in the oversight of the Erie County Sheriff's Office Jail Management Division and hereby intends to increase participation to the maximum permitted by the Erie County Charter.

## SECTION 2. CREATION OF AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE ERIE COUNTY CORRECTIONS SPECIALIST ADVISORY BOARD

The Erie County Corrections Specialist Advisory Board is hereby established.

### Membership

The Advisory Board shall consist of eleven (11) fifteen (15) voting members as follows:

- [One] Two members to be recommended by the Chair of the Erie County Legislature

New material is underlined. [Bracketed] 2material is to be deleted.

- ~~[One]~~ Two members to be recommended by the Majority Leader of the Erie County Legislature
- ~~[One]~~ Two members to be recommended by the Minority Leader of the Erie County Legislature
- One member to be recommended by the Chair of the Public Safety Committee of the Erie County Legislature
- One member to be recommended by the Erie County Executive
- One member to be recommended by the Erie County Sheriff
- One member to be recommended by the Erie County Commissioner of Probation
- One member to be recommended by the Erie County Commissioner of Mental Health
- One member to be recommended by the Bar Association of Erie County
- One member with demonstrated experience in advocacy for prisoners to be recommended by an organization working on behalf of prisoners' rights
- One member with demonstrated experience with restorative justice to be recommended by an organization that is dedicated to restorative justice
- One member with demonstrated experience in assisting former offenders' transitions to be recommended by an organization that is dedicated to ex-offender transition from jail/prison to life in the general public

Members shall be approved by a majority vote of the Erie County Legislature and shall serve without compensation.

#### Terms of Advisory Board Members

~~[After the initial appointments expire, ]~~Advisory Board members shall serve three-year terms. ~~[No member may serve more than two (2) consecutive terms, including the completion of a term of another voting member and/or the initial terms. Those who have served two (2) consecutive terms may be eligible again after a two (2) year absence to serve on the Board.]~~

### SECTION 3. QUALIFICATIONS OF MEMBERS

All members must meet the minimum requirements set forth in Section 2205 of the Erie County Charter including:

- Each Advisory Board member shall be a resident of Erie County at the time of appointment and shall remain a resident of Erie County while holding a position as a member of the Advisory Board.
- Members of the Advisory Board may not serve as elected public officers for Erie County~~[hold elective office]~~.

### SECTION 4. MEETINGS

New material is underlined. ~~[Bracketed]~~ 3material is to be deleted.

At the first meeting of the Advisory Board, the Board shall elect a member as chairperson, and another member as vice-chairperson. The chairperson and vice-chairperson shall serve in such positions for two years and may not serve more than two consecutive terms. The vice-chairperson shall serve in the absence of the chairperson and in such other capacity as the chairperson shall delegate.

The Advisory Board shall establish a schedule of regular meetings for the year, but the Advisory Board shall meet a minimum of four (4) times per year.

Unless otherwise provided by law, a majority of the members shall constitute a quorum at any duly held meeting of the Advisory Board. The affirmative vote of a majority of all members shall be required for Advisory Board action on any matter.

At each meeting of the Advisory Board, time will be set aside for public comment on issues relevant to the stated intent in the adopted bylaws of the Advisory Board. If no such individuals or organizations have contacted the Chairperson of the Advisory Board to request time to testify, the Advisory Board will forgo the time for public comment at that meeting of the Board. Requests to testify can be made to the Chairperson of the Advisory Board by filing such request with the Clerk of the Erie County Legislature at least five (5) business days prior to the Meeting of the Advisory Board.

#### SECTION 5. PROCEDURES.

The Advisory Board shall adopt standards of conduct and disclosure of interests intended to ensure that the actions of the Advisory Board are carried out in an ethical manner. The ethical standards shall be consistent with the Erie County Code of Ethics.

The Advisory Board may adopt such bylaws and/or rules and procedures for the efficient and orderly conduct of its business as it deems necessary or appropriate under Section 2205 of the Erie County Charter. Such rules and procedures shall provide reasonable opportunity for public comment and engagement.

The Advisory Board shall adopt bylaws that are not in conflict with Section 2205 of the Erie County Charter or any provisions of this Local Law, and subject to the approval of the Erie County Legislature.

It is hereby established, this local law does charge the Advisory Board the ability to design and enforce the bylaws under which such board will function. Bylaws must be in writing, filed with the Erie County Legislature, and open to inspection by members of the Advisory Board, the Erie County Legislature, and other elected officials. Bylaws may include, but are not limited to, the procedures for the taking of meeting minutes, the procedures for submitting grievances, the procedure for recommending the use of the Legislature's subpoena power, and the procedure for writing and submitting reports to the Erie County Legislature. Bylaws must be filed with the Erie County Legislature at least thirty (30) days prior to the first advisory board meeting. In order to establish bylaws, the members of the Advisory Board must be in quorum, and at least seven (7) ten (10)



affirmative votes submitted. Amendments to the bylaws must be passed in quorum, with the affirmative vote of at least [seven] ten (10) Advisory Board members.

The Advisory Board will produce, annually, a report on the progress of the Board for the previous year and their goals for the upcoming year. The report is to be filed with the Clerk of the Erie County Legislature and shall be reviewed by the Public Safety Committee of the Erie County Legislature.

## SECTION 6. POWERS AND FUNCTIONS

### Powers

The Advisory Board shall:

1. Function in an advisory capacity to the Erie County Legislature as well as to the Erie County's Sheriff's Office.

The Advisory Board may:

1. Recommend that the Chairperson of the Erie County Legislature utilize his/her subpoena power under Section 2607 of the Erie County Charter, as necessary, to compel the presence and testimony of persons or the production of records to the Advisory Board when other mechanisms to compel such presence or data are otherwise unsuccessful through the following procedure:
  - (a) A formal recommendation suggesting utilization of the Legislature's subpoena power may be submitted to the Erie County Legislature's Public Safety Committee. After which, members of the Public Safety Committee shall vote on whether to submit the request to the Chair of the Erie County Legislature. Requests that pass by a majority vote of the Public Safety Committee shall then be submitted to the Chair of the Erie County Legislature for a final decision on the potential utilization of subpoena power.

### Functions

The Advisory Board may undertake functions and activities intended to:

1. Develop strategic plans and policies to be considered by the Legislature and the Sheriff's Office that will improve the conditions, systems and practices at the Erie County Holding Center and Correctional Facility and help reduce recidivism in Erie County.
2. Allow public comment on the issues related to the Erie County Holding Center and Erie County Correctional Facility
3. Make formal advisory recommendations to the County Legislature and the Erie County Sheriff's Office on the programs, funding and services for the correctional facilities in Erie County.
4. Receive complaints regarding the Erie County Holding Center and the Erie County Correctional Facility from the public and refer such

complaints to the Erie County Sheriff's Office for investigation and reporting back to the Advisory Board.

#### SECTION 7. STAFF SUPPORT

The Chair of the Erie County Legislature shall choose amongst the staff of the Legislature one person to serve as Clerk of the Advisory Board. Such staff member will communicate with members, and the public through notices, regarding meetings, agendas and items that are before the Advisory Board. The Clerk will be responsible for taking the roll, recording votes of the members at meetings and communicating with groups seeking to testify before the Advisory Board. The Clerk will also be responsible for disseminating the minutes of the meetings to Advisory Board members and working with the Chair of the Advisory Board to produce an Annual Report to be filed with the Clerk of the Erie County Legislature and reviewed by the Public Safety Committee of the Erie County Legislature.

#### SECTION 8. EFFECTIVE DATE

This Local Law shall take effect upon passage by the Legislature.

#### SECTION 9. SEVERABILITY

If any clause, sentence, paragraph, subdivision, section or part of this Local Law or the application thereof, to any person, individual, corporation, firm, partnership, entity or circumstance, shall be adjudged by any court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid or unconstitutional such order of judgment shall not affect, impair, or invalidate the remainder thereof, but shall be confined in its operation to the clause, sentence, paragraph, subdivision, section, or part of this Local Law or in its application to the person, individual, corporation, firm, partnership, entity, or circumstance directly involved in the controversy in which such judgment or order shall be rendered.

#### SPONSORED BY:

**TAISHA ST. JEAN TARD, TIMOTHY MEYERS**