



SHERIFF OF ERIE COUNTY

September 18, 2025

2025 SEP 18 '25 8:10:57

The Honorable
Erie County Legislature
92 Franklin St.
Buffalo, NY 14202

Re: Capital Project A.24059 – Helicopter Purchase

Honorable Members:

As the Public Safety Committee prepares to consider Comm. 16E-53 later this morning, I want to clear up some inaccuracies that were included in a letter sent to you by Comptroller Kevin Hardwick, dated September 17, 2025. Unfortunately, Comptroller Hardwick's letter, which requests that you amend Comm. 16E-53, appears to include bad math and incorrect information that I must correct for you.

The Comptroller's letter states that there is a gap of between \$4 million and \$4.7 million to purchase the second helicopter associated with Capital Project A.24059. This is not accurate. The budget for this project includes enough funding to purchase both base helicopters. As the County has already expended a deposit of \$1,464,904.00 for the helicopter purchase, the County will owe Airbus a remainder of approximately \$5,745,076.00. This includes a \$500,000.00 trade in value for the current Air 1. Thus, the purchase of the helicopters comes in at \$754,924.00 below what is budgeted. As my Office has stated multiple times before, we continue to seek funding opportunities to complete the upfit of the helicopters. While we are confident that federal funds will become available, we are developing possible contingencies, as I shared with you during the July 16, 2025 mid-year budget hearing.

Let's recall where this project started and how we got here. As the Erie County Sheriff's Office Aviation Unit is a regional asset to the citizens of Western New York, we were all in agreement in 2023 that our aircraft needed to be upgraded. That is why this Honorable Body approved a capital project for the 2024 budget. My Office proactively sought funding opportunities from state and federal sources. We have done this to lessen the burden on our county taxpayers. While it was our initial expectation that our new aircraft would be a single H-135 helicopter at a cost of \$7,324,520.00, the Federal Aviation Administration declined to approve the cockpit configuration that our Aviation Unit requires to be functional. We were then presented an opportunity to purchase two (2) H-125 helicopters, while trading-in the current Air-1, at a lower cost of \$7,209,980.00. This didn't just present a tactical opportunity to ensure continuity of service to the public. It saved taxpayers \$114,540.00.

The Comptroller correctly notes that he is the county's chief financial officer and its internal watchdog. I find it curious, however, that as the chief financial officer, he would advocate breaching a contract and forfeiting more than \$1.4 million in county funds that we have already deposited for this project.

As Sheriff, I am the chief elected law enforcement official. **My single-largest concern is public safety.** With this capital project, we are boosting public safety across Erie County and beyond. Our helicopter has been down for service more in the last 12 months than it has been available to be up in the air. In fact, it is out of service as I write to you today. Imagine my frustration when a police chief calls me asking for Air 1's assistance with an investigation or the search of a missing person, and I have to tell him or her that there's nothing I can do. This is why it is said that to have one helicopter is to have none; to have two is to have one. Possessing two aircraft eliminates down time and will enable us to respond to the next life-saving request we receive. Our Aviation Unit is staffed by several capable pilots and tactical flight officers. We owe it to them and to our constituents to offer quality, top of the line equipment. This Honorable Body agreed when this capital project was approved; I am confident you still agree today.

Yours Very Truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John C. Garcia". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "G".

John C. Garcia
Sheriff of Erie County

cc: Mark Poloncarz, Erie County Executive
Kevin Hardwick, Erie County Comptroller
Mark Cornell, Director of Budget and Management