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SHERIFF OF ERIE COUNTY

February 5, 2026

The Honorable
Erie County Legislature
92 Franklin Street
Buffalo, NY 14202

Re: Holding Center Sewage Leak

Honorable Members:

I am writing to make you aware of an urgent situation at the Erie County Holding Center that has had a grave impact on our staff and incarcerated population in recent days. An incredibly foul smell inside the jail facility and the Erie County Sheriff's Office administrative offices next door has prompted an avalanche of verbal complaints from our employees. In seeking out the source of this stomach-turning stench, we were shocked by what we found underneath the building. It is more than just inconvenient; it's unsanitary.

Near the kitchen, a contractor located what he called a "significant amount of standing sewage and water" in the crawlspaces and chases of the jail. A septic vacuum truck is required to clean the area. To quote the contractor, "(T)he consistency of the waste is too liquid to effectively scoop and muck out and too solid/semi-solid to effectively extract with portable extraction equipment." These spaces were also populated by a combination of dead and live rats.

To date, the estimated cost of the pump-out and cleanup is \$43,296.02. However, I fear that figure may increase. As the crews perform this work, we hope they will locate the yet-to-be-identified source of this sewage leak. Ideally, these leaks can be easily found and repaired without any excavation or additional site work.

This can hardly be called a surprise, and it is indicative of a larger issue that has gone unaddressed over the last two months. As written in the Comprehensive Facility and Operational Needs Assessment for the Erie County Holding Center and Erie County Correctional Facility System in May 2025:

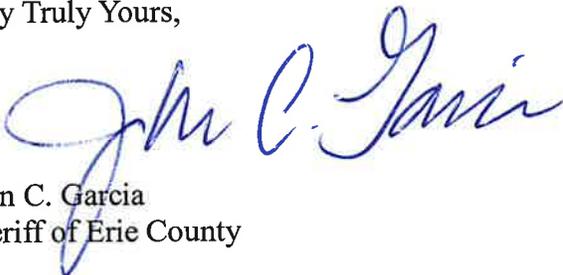
(D)ue to its age (the original portion of the ECHC was built in 1937), the building requires a wide range of upkeep and maintenance, including the constant need for replacement of fixtures, finishes and equipment which is a strain on both financial and staffing resources. There is a strong consensus that the current ECHC facility cannot be rehabilitated.

The Legislature's decision last December to eliminate a new jail design study from the 2026 capital budget indeed had real world consequences that will affect our staff and incarcerated population. We must continue to operate an outdated and antiquated facility with failing infrastructure for years to come. I fully respect that some of you engaged in good faith deliberations and weighed the cost versus the benefit of building a new jail. However, the removal of this project without any further discussion about how to move forward sent an unfortunate message that this Body neither cares about my staff nor our incarcerated population. Do we really want to live in this world where they are forced to endure such conditions?

The sewage problem is the tip of the iceberg. Air handlers at both the Erie County Holding Center and Erie County Correctional Facility are at or beyond their life expectancy. Windows at both facilities need to be either fixed or replaced. The Alden Correctional Facility's generators are at the end of their lifespan, while the downtown Holding Center's aren't far from the end of their useful life. Tamperproof electrical switches, camera upgrades and a new perimeter road are all needed in Alden, where 48 bunks and two constant observation cells are presently out of service due to roof and window leaks. Replacement joint sealant between stone panels, water leak issues and the deterioration of fiber optic network lines need to be addressed at the downtown jail, where 127 cells are currently out of order because of plumbing, electrical, structural and locking issues. My Jail Management team is forced to navigate these developing issues each and every day.

If sewage started spilling at the Rath Building, county department heads could tell their staff to pack it up and work from home. We do not have that option. My Jail Management Division employees have no choice but to work through this difficult situation. Luckily, I am staffed with hundreds of jail deputies and correction officers who are dedicated public servants. They will continue to report to work, and we will continue to conduct our correctional operations as mandated, no matter the conditions. These individuals are truly Erie County's toughest. But they deserve better, and I demand better on their behalf.

Very Truly Yours,



John C. Garcia
Sheriff of Erie County

cc: Mark Poloncarz, Erie County Executive
William Geary, Commissioner of Public Works
Daniel Castle, Commissioner of Environment and Planning