



Inclusion Through Diversity

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jail Study Committee Receives Jail Population Report

The Legislature's special Jail Study Committee today heard consultants from the Center for Governmental Research (CGR) present their findings from their six-month study related to capacity issues at the Tompkins County Jail.

CGR's final report, received by the County last week, finds that Tompkins does not need to build a new jail or expand the number of beds in the existing jail, due both to Tompkins County population projections over the next 25 years and savings in bed days that can result from effective use and expansion of incarceration alternatives.

CGR consultants guided the committee, and members of the public, through its findings and recommendations, which include several near-term inmate-reduction strategies, such as expanding substance abuse assessments and access to residential rehab treatment and supporting creation of non-jail medical detox capacity. Also among the many items recommended, expanding the interior footprint of the Jail to allow for more inmate services; coordinating and refocusing the re-entry program; and criminal justice initiatives, such as presumption of non-financial release.

Legislators thanked CGR for its work, and representatives of the community for their important role as part of the study process. "I can't resist saying what a big deal this is," said Legislator Martha Robertson. "We've been here before with a lot consultants and a lot of time...This really is thoughtful, comprehensive, innovative, and extremely helpful...I think we in the community are willing to spend money on this and are prepared to do the work." Praising CGR's research, Legislator Jim Dennis said, "If we're looking for ways to reduce the population and satisfy the [State Commission of Correction], you've given us a roadmap to do that." Also expressing her appreciation, and referring to what sometimes seemed to be an adversarial relationship with community advocates, Legislator Anna Kelles said, "I hope this report brings us to the same page...I think this is something that will bring the community and the government together...This is just the beginning." Kelles urged members of the group *Decarcerate Tompkins* to continue to be involved as the process moves forward.

Several members of the community spoke positively about the study. "Certainly, we were very impressed with the depth and positive nature of the study, and we are excited to support it," said Elan Shapiro. He expressed hope that robust community engagement will continue, including involving those who are formerly incarcerated as stakeholders. "While it has an adversarial tone at times, we can see this as dynamic tension of real democracy...I hope we can move to real collaboration," he said.

Stressing that the County Legislature has no influence over the courts, Legislators Robertson and Kelles also both urged the public to become involved and educate themselves on the local justice courts as one part of criminal justice advocacy, and to attend court sessions, noting that anyone can be elected and serve.

The committee must now review the study findings and decide how it recommends that the County proceed. Noting the time pressure to formulate recommendations to New York State, regarding continuation of the Jail's 18-bed variance, Committee Chair Rich John predicted an intensive process. "We have a lot of work to do," he said.

Reflecting on his remarks at the time the Jail Study Committee began work last year, Mr. John said, "A jail really reflects the values of the community...and that's absolutely true in Tompkins County...This was all triggered by New York State. In some ways, it has been a good thing that New York State has taken us to task. Ultimately, I think we are going to end up with a better criminal justice system, and certainly a more thoughtful one."

The study report, entitled "An Assessment of the Future of the Tompkins County Jail," is posted at CGR's project website at www.cgr.org/TompkinsCrimJust/documents, and may also be accessed through the Tompkins County home page at www.TompkinsCountyNY.gov (See "Popular Links – Tompkins County Jail Population Study.")

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