

Legislative Committee

May 8, 2024

3:28 p.m.

Attendees

Committee: Allen Hinkley, Art Merrill, Lisa Driscoll, Eric Wilson, Tina Molé

Absent: Timothy Kelso

Staff: Deb Goodrich, Judith Garrison, Maria Kelso, Joe Ermeti, Amy Merklen, Penny Bishop

Mr. Hinkley called the meeting to order at 3:28 p.m. The March 6 committee meeting minutes had been approved via email and were posted to the website.

Public Defender Joe Ermeti brought several Budget Requests for Salary Upgrade forms for committee review. He thanked the committee for increasing CAP court upgrade in pay and said that the increase enabled him to hire another CAP attorney. His office is at four CAP court attorneys which will alleviate much of the burden. He is still working to fill the Chief Assistant position. He noted that attorneys could be offered \$50 an hour to work in his office or they could make \$158 an hour doing assigned counsel work. The state has created a real mess by raising the assigned counsel rate, and his office cannot compete. He expressed the need to pay \$150 an hour in salary for an attorney. In reply to Mrs. Driscoll, Mr. Ermeti said there are not many assigned counsel attorneys, but they could easily work 30 to 40 hours a week. Mrs. Bishop noted they recently received two 18-B vouchers from a law firm out of Albany.

County Attorney Amy Merklen stated her office currently has two attorney openings, but she expects one position will be filled in September. She noted it is hard to compete with Otsego County because of their health insurance package. Mr. Ermeti stated Otsego County starts PD attorneys at \$100,000 to \$124,000. Ms. Merklen agreed saying they also start DSS attorneys at \$100,000 minimum. Mr. Ermeti said at some point, there has to be a realization that we will need to have a major upgrade in attorney salaries. Ms. Merklen said that although there has been an increase recently, it is not going to be enough. She reported that they hired a legal secretary to fill that vacancy in her office.

County Clerk Deb Goodrich distributed March and April revenue reports. She noted the April recordings were higher, but the overall revenue is down due to the state portion being more. Mr. Wilson stated there is no negotiating with the state. Mr. Merrill said the state wants everything done online. Mrs. Goodrich reviewed extensive requirements for a REAL ID, which the state requires the data be brought to a local DMV office for processing.

Elections Commissioner Maria Kelso reported federal ballots will be mailed on Friday; there is no republican primary, only a democratic primary involving 11 towns. They have received guidelines for the even year election transition. She stated petitions are due May 21-28. School elections will be held May 21.

Ms. Molé reported that the county will have four new security guards who will start on Monday. The guards will be posted at 97 Main Street, 99 Main Street, and at One Courthouse Square in Delhi, and at DSS South in Walton, once DSS moves into those offices.

Mrs. Goodrich reported they are cleaning out the Lextriever machine which is in their front office. They are unable to get parts to keep it operational and they no longer have a maintenance agreement on it. Given the condition of the machine, they would like maintenance to scrap it. Mrs. Bishop said the County Clerk's office would need to do a resolution for the disposition.

Ms. Merklen indicated her office has a lot of files that need to be shredded. She must maintain custody of the files until they are destroyed. Mrs. Goodrich stated they use a company that brings a shredding truck, and she will share the contact information.

Upon a motion by Mr. Merrill, seconded by Mr. Wilson, and unanimously carried, the Committee entered into an executive session to discuss ongoing litigation.

Committee reconvened in regular session.

Upon a motion, the meeting adjourned at 3:55 p.m.