



COUNTY OF ONONDAGA

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*County Comptroller*

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To the Editor:

Onondaga County Executive Joanie Mahoney's Tentative Budget cuts six members of the Comptroller's payroll audit staff. In an effort to explain this decision, Deputy County Executive William Fisher has said it is done as part of a reorganization of County government to make it more efficient with the implementation of a computer program called PeopleSoft. Of course, the fox would say it is more efficient for him to guard the henhouse.

Onondaga County's governing documents, the Charter and Administrative Code, require the Comptroller to audit and certify for payment all lawful claims against the County, including payroll. The Comptroller's staff has done this since Onondaga County adopted its charter form of government in the 1960s. Now, in a move which I was not even consulted on, the County Executive unilaterally decided it was more efficient to cut 29% of the Comptroller's salary budget. Yet with a straight face, she claims she has not taken any power away from the Office of Comptroller. Quite simply, how can I do my job if she will not give me the resources necessary?

Sadly, this is not the first time the County Executive has tried to confuse the obvious. During her campaign for reelection, she made numerous claims about cutting taxes by 25%. Being a statement made in the heat of a campaign, I wrote it off as political hyperbole made by a candidate. When the campaign ended and Mahoney was reelected, she repeated the claim. As it was no longer political grandstanding and now a statement by the County Executive, we reviewed property taxes since she took office in 2008. The fact is Onondaga County is using 16% more in property taxes today than nine years ago.

This budget is another example of hiding the facts. With great fanfare, it was announced the property tax rate would remain flat. But that only tells a small part of the story! The County Executive's budget anticipates \$3 million more collected in property taxes, it includes \$35 million more in spending, and it will also add 53 positions! All this despite the numerous claims

we are in dire financial troubles. Shockingly, the only department which saw cuts in the County Executive's Tentative Budget was the Comptroller.

The idea that PeopleSoft will make County finances more efficient would be funny if it wasn't so sad. PeopleSoft was originally purchased in 2010 through a \$6 million contract, but after spending millions more in consultant fees and updates, the County has fully implemented PeopleSoft in only 5 of 18 modules purchased. The financial module, one of the few actually installed, has double-digit error rates. Ask employees of the County how many incorrect paychecks would be an acceptable amount. The PeopleSoft program is not even close to being ready, yet it is the justification the Administration gives for slashing the payroll audit staff.

Jumping the gun on PeopleSoft will not save money and will potentially cost the County hundreds of millions of dollars. When National Grid attempted a similar premature switch in payroll software, the system was plagued by numerous errors. The problems were so egregious, National Grid paid its employees millions of dollars in compensation in New York alone ([http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2014/10/cost\\_of\\_national\\_grids\\_flawed\\_software\\_roll\\_out\\_nears\\_1\\_billion\\_psc\\_says.html](http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2014/10/cost_of_national_grids_flawed_software_roll_out_nears_1_billion_psc_says.html)). If the Administration insists on taking PeopleSoft live in payroll, not only will I need my payroll audit staff, I may very well need more of them!

Mr. Fisher is quoted as saying the budget is a complicated thing. He's right, at over a billion dollars and many departments, County government is complicated. But what is simple is the Charter and Code. The Comptroller provides independent oversight over County government. By cutting the six staff members who audit payroll, the County Executive proposes eliminating significant oversight. I urge you to contact your County Legislator and tell him or her don't neuter the watchdog.

Thank you.



Robert E. Antonacci II, CPA