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2 STATE OF NEW YORK : **ONONDAGA COUNTY LEGISLATURE**

3 COUNTY OF ONONDAGA

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5 In the Matter of

6 PUBLIC HEARING - 2021 BUDGET
7 -----

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9 Virtual PUBLIC HEARING in the above matter,
10 conducted from the Onondaga County Court House
11 Legislative Chambers, 401 Montgomery Street, 4th
12 Floor, Syracuse, New York before JOHN F. DRURY,
13 CSR & RPR, Notary Public in and for the State of
14 New York, on December 1, 2020, 6:00 pm to 6:30 pm.

12 **ONONDAGA COUNTY LEGISLATORS PRESENT:**

13 DIST. NAME

14 1st BRIAN F. MAY
15 2nd JAMES J. ROWLEY
16 **3rd TIM BURTIS, Chair Ways & Means**
17 4th JUDITH A. TASSONE (Absent)
18 5th DEBRA J. COD
19 6th JULIE ABBOTT-KENAN
20 7th MARY T. KUHN
21 8th CHRISTOPHER J. RYAN
22 9th PEGGY CHASE
23 10th KEVIN A. HOLMQUIST
24 11th JOHN D. McBRIDE
25 12th DAVID H. KNAPP, Legislative Chairman
13th KEN BUSH, JR.
14th CASEY E. JORDAN
15th WILLIAM T. KINNE
16th VERNON M. WILLIAMS, JR.
17th LINDA R. ERVIN

23 Clerk of Legislature: Jamie McNamara
24 Legislative Aide: Ryan P. Frantzis

25 Reported By:
John F. Drury, CSR, RPR
Court Reporter 471-7397

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Chair Burtis

CHAIRMAN KNAPP: So moved.

FEMALE LEGISLATOR: I'll second.

CHAIR BURTIS: We have Chairman Knapp, thank you. Was the Notice of the Hearing duly published?

CLERK McNAMARA: It was.

CHAIR BURTIS: I have a list of speakers here -- I only have two. I have Randi Bregman and Samantha Sorensen. Before we start with that as you come to speak would just ask that you state your name, and as is customary here at the County Legislature, we give you two to three minutes. We'd ask that your remarks only be on the budget that is in front of us. And just keep in mind that it's my job to keep control of the meeting, which would be the time and content, and appreciate you being here. So with that being said let's start with Randi Bregman from Vera House. Thank you.

RANDI BREGMAN: Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you

B r e g m a n

1
2 this evening. I can't think of a more
3 difficult year for the County Executive
4 and the County Legislature, to have to
5 make decisions on budgets, and I
6 understand how incredibly challenging
7 this year is.

8 I did want to make sure that I
9 offered an accurate picture of Vera
10 House's current five contracts with the
11 county. Because it does seem like there
12 is a bit of confusion with some
13 transition and also just a lot of the
14 craziness with Covid.

15 I also want to say that I understand
16 the Legislature had temporarily moved
17 some Vera House funds into contingency,
18 and I was very pleased to hear that the
19 money has been moved out of contingency
20 and will be included in the budget, and
21 I want to thank the Legislature for that.

22 Throughout the pandemic both the
23 Governor and the County Executive
24 highlighted concerns about the impact
25 the pandemic was having on domestic

B r e g m a n

1
2 violence victims, often trapped in their
3 homes, feeling less safe at home, unlike
4 others who are trying to be safe by
5 avoiding the virus. We serve these
6 victims throughout the pandemic. Our
7 shelter has been filled to capacity
8 throughout, and our support services
9 outside of shelter continued
10 uninterrupted, often remotely rather
11 than in person. Our staff and volunteers
12 literally work night and day to make
13 sure that every call was answered and
14 every need met.

15 In terms of the contracts that
16 provide the support for that funding, we
17 have two smaller contracts that are for
18 our abuse program for people with
19 abusive behaviors. Those are fee for
20 service programs. And then we have
21 three larger contracts that allow us to
22 provide direct services to victims.

23 We have a contract with Adult and
24 Long Term Care Services, and I think
25 this is one that there is a lot of

B r e g m a n

1
2 confusion about. It was reduced during
3 2020 to about 240,000 after the Covid
4 reduction. That contract began when the
5 county restructured its department. It
6 had always been a contract with the
7 Department of Social Services. It is
8 non-residential domestic violence
9 services, which the state office of
10 children and family service then
11 delegates usually to local departments
12 of social service. But when the county
13 was restructured it went to adult and
14 long term care. It does provide for
15 advocacy services for education, for
16 training, for outreach for domestic
17 violence, for people of all ages,
18 although it landed in Adult and Long
19 Term Care.

20 A few years ago staff at Adult and
21 Long Term Care Services who were working
22 closely with our team addressing elder
23 abuse recognized that there was a need
24 for expanded services targeted to elder
25 abuse victims. And they were able to

B r e g m a n

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2 secure additional mental health dollars
3 to supplement the non-residential
4 domestic violence funding in that
5 contract. And that's what brought us up
6 to the 250,000 originally last year,
7 reduced to the 240,000.

8 It enables us to provide an elder
9 abuse advocate who works specifically
10 with seniors who have experienced elder
11 abuse. We offer support groups for
12 those seniors. Actually one of first
13 remote groups we did after the virus
14 struck, we didn't know we could do
15 groups remotely, but we had members of
16 our elder abuse group who said they were
17 so isolated and really looking for
18 connection. So it was the first group
19 we were able to set up on zoom. Those
20 services are all available through the
21 funding that's gone through adult and
22 long term care services.

23 Funding from that grant year to date
24 has allowed us to answer almost 4,500
25 calls in our crisis line. Without any

B r e g m a n

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2 additional funding from the county we
3 recognize that people were not able to
4 call us when they were trapped at home
5 due to domestic violence situations and
6 Covid. So we established a chat line
7 that runs 8:30 in the morning to 11:00
8 p.m. seven days a week. We've had
9 almost 250 people contact us on that
10 chat line for service. And we've had
11 over a hundred people walk into our
12 office despite Covid in crisis
13 situations, needing immediate help that
14 we have responded to with that
15 assistance.

16 We also were able to provide remote
17 services for Orders of Protection as
18 things were spinning in the Court. We
19 were able to do Orders of Protection
20 remotely, and even have people come in
21 here and do their remote session with
22 the Court with an advocate here, social
23 distance and masks, in order to provide
24 those services.

25 In addition we have two contracts

B r e g m a n

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2 with the Department of Children and
3 Family Services. Those contracts
4 allowed us to provide therapy services
5 for children who come into McMahon-Ryan
6 Child Advocacy Center as sexual abuse
7 victims. And we also have a contract to
8 provide services to children who witness
9 domestic violence. That's also
10 non-residential domestic violence
11 dollars that come in through the state.
12 But that pot of money happens to go to
13 Children and Family Services. So it's a
14 little bit confusing how all that money
15 comes in.

16 Overall we have served 367 child
17 victims year to date, offering
18 individual, family and group therapies
19 for children in use of all agents who
20 witnessed domestic violence or
21 experienced sexual abuse.

22 Many of our services this year have
23 been provided remotely, and this has
24 offered our therapists a chance to meet
25 peoples pets, explore children's

B r e g m a n

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2 personal treasures, and have eyes and
3 ears as to what's going on in the home.

4 We sought funding outside of
5 Onondaga County to be able to offer the
6 equipment and WiFi services to families
7 so that they would be able to engage in
8 remote services. Many of the youth and
9 families we served have told our
10 therapist that Vera House has been a
11 lifeline during this incredibly
12 challenging time.

13 In sum, given the additional risks
14 posed to adult and child victims facing
15 domestic violence, and elder abuse and
16 sexual abuse during the pandemic, and
17 dedicated and faithful service our staff
18 has provided throughout, we are looking
19 to retain funding as close to 2020
20 levels as possible in order to maintain
21 the levels of service we know will be
22 critical.

23 I've also, in the written comments
24 I've submitted, attached a one page
25 summary of the contract levels. It

Sorensen

1
2 seems like some people are talking about
3 a 15 percent cut, but it looks to us
4 like it's much more than that. So we're
5 hoping you can do what you can to allow
6 us to maintain service levels. And I
7 really appreciate the time to speak with
8 you tonight.

9 CHAIR BURTIS: Thank you. I
10 appreciate that. Thanks for coming. So
11 next up we have Samantha Sorensen.

12 **SAMANTHA SORENSEN:** Hi. Thank you
13 so much for letting me speak tonight,
14 thank you for your time. I understand
15 this is a very hard year. Also thank
16 you for Randi from Vera House, who is
17 truly a lifeline in our community, so
18 thank you for the work that you do.

19 I want to speak about a specific
20 issue that I think we need to pay
21 attention to, more so in the budget for
22 mental health. During the pandemic, a
23 lot of people are going to be committing
24 suicide and having mental health issues
25 now more than ever due to lack of face

1 Legislator Kinne

2 spoken up.

3 CHAIR BURTIS: Very good. All
4 right, are there any Legislators that
5 would like to speak? Any other
6 Legislators, this is your time.

7 **LEGISLATOR KINNE:** I'd like to say
8 something. This is new to me. In the
9 past I thought it was just the public
10 that was allowed to speak. If you're
11 being kind enough to let me say
12 something I would like to say something.

13 CHAIR BURTIS: Go ahead.

14 **LEGISLATOR KINNE:** My name is Bill
15 Kinne, County Legislator from the 15th
16 District. We all know this is a tough
17 year. And I understand the hesitancy of
18 the Executive Department and the
19 Legislature to not touch the fund balance.
20 But I was always of the impression that
21 the fund balance was for emergencies for
22 when times were tough, when we had
23 unusual events. I think we can all
24 agree this is an unusual event.

25 And it's not like we're adding taxes

Legislator Kinne

1
2 because we're not. This is money
3 already collected from the taxpayer. It
4 seems to me that we could agree on some
5 amount, you know, that would be helpful
6 to the community in this time of need
7 and strife. And the good thing about
8 this is that if the state comes through
9 and/or the federal government comes
10 through or there is extra sales tax
11 money, we'll be able to replenish the
12 fund.

13 So I'm not on the Ways and Means
14 Committee, but I would really appreciate
15 it if all the legislators would give
16 some thought to that and dip into the
17 fund balance. I'm not talking about 50
18 million dollars, I'm not talking about
19 30 million dollars, I'm talking about
20 some amount we could agree on that is
21 helpful to the people of our community
22 for the following year, 2021. So thank
23 you very much for allowing me to say
24 that.

25 CHAIR BURTIS: Yes, Legislator,

1
2 thank you. It is a fact we're going to
3 need 20 million dollars to close 2020.
4 That's what we've been discussing. Any
5 other Legislators here before we close?
6 Going once. Hearing none, then the
7 hearing is now closed. I'll bang my
8 gavel. I'll wish you a good night.
9 Thank you for joining us, and have a
10 good night. Thank you.

11 (Conclusion of public hearing).

12 * * * *

13 C E R T I F I C A T E

14 This is to certify that I am a
15 Certified Shorthand Reporter and Notary
16 Public in and for the State of New York,
17 that I attended and reported the above
18 entitled proceedings, that I have
19 compared the foregoing with my original
20 minutes taken therein and that it is a
21 true and correct transcript thereof and
22 all of the proceedings had therein.

19 _____
20 John F. Drury, CSR

21 Dated: December 3, 2020
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