



**JAMIE McNAMARA**  
Clerk

# Onondaga County Legislature

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Chairman

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Deputy Clerk

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## **PUBLIC HEARING REGARDING THE 2025 COUNTY BUDGET OCTOBER 3, 2024, 5:30 P.M.**

Livestream available at [www.facebook.com/OnondagaCountyLegislature](https://www.facebook.com/OnondagaCountyLegislature)

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Ms. Gunnip, Mr. May, Mr. Ryan, Ms. Abbott, Mr. Romeo, Mr. Knapp, Mr. Garland

**ALSO ATTENDING:** Chairman Burtis, Mr. Meaker, Ms. Cody, Ms. Harvey, Mr. Olson, Mr. Bush, Dr. Kelly, Mr. Brown, Ms. Hernandez

Chair Gunnip called the 5:30 p.m. public hearing to order at 5:39 p.m. and stated that the resolution of the Legislature authorizing the public hearing had been entered into the record. The Clerk answered Chair Gunnip that the notice had been duly published.

Chair Gunnip called the following speakers to the podium:

1. Peggy Chase, former Onondaga County Legislator
2. Jill Hurst-Wahl, member of the Public Library Board of Trustees (*statement attached*)
3. Luanne DeFelice, Constituent (*statement attached*)
4. Maureen G. Murphy, member of the Syracuse Environmental Justice Coalition (*statement attached*)
5. Anthony Pitts, Good Life Youth Foundation representative (*statement attached*)
6. Rich Puchalski, Constituent (*statement attached*)
7. Marianna Pernia, Constituent (*statement attached*)
8. Elaine Denton, Constituent (*statement attached*)

Chair Gunnip asked if there were any other speakers wishing to be heard, and there were none.

The public hearing was adjourned at 6:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A blue ink signature of Jamie McNamara, consisting of a stylized 'J' and 'M' followed by a horizontal line.

JAMIE McNAMARA, Clerk  
Onondaga County Legislature

## **For the Public Hearing on the 2025 County Budget**

My name is Jill Hurst-Wahl. I am a member of the Onondaga County Public Library Board of Trustees.

I know that each of you visits the libraries in your district during the year. While you may go for a specific event, undoubtedly you see a variety of activities occurring:

- Children are reading and improving their reading comprehension.
- Parents are engaged in activities with their kids.
- Students are making things and learning creative problem solving.
- Book clubs are meeting where adults expand their horizons.
- New Americans are improving their English.
- People are using the computers to update their resumes and apply for jobs.
- Others are connecting with resources available at various libraries, such as the Volunteer Lawyers Project of Onondaga County.
- Many people – young and old – are learning new technologies.

And people are searching the online catalogue and borrowing books from across the system. The online catalogue and the delivery system

are the most public activities of OCPL: System and are a critical service to all of the member libraries.

The 32 library locations across Onondaga County's nearly 800 square miles are hubs of activities in their communities. They are one of the few remaining social spaces outside of the home and workplace where people can connect with their community, without paying an entry fee or being a member. Our libraries are places where people build relationships, exchange ideas, learn, and grow.

Our public libraries serve everyone, no matter their age, ethnic origin, preferred language, or political stance. Our doors – both physical and virtual – are open to everyone. And you have likely seen library services provided at farmers markets, eldercare facilities, and community events, because we believe that we need to bring services to where people are.

Funding for OCPL helps all our public libraries across the County, because OCPL's services assist each of them. Therefore, thank you for including over 16 million dollars (\$16,758,878) for OCPL in the 2025 County budget. Your willingness to fund OCPL acknowledges the importance of public libraries in your communities. Thank YOU for supporting libraries.

# Onondaga County Budget Hearing 10/3/2024

A statement from Luanne DeFelice, Baldwinsville NY, member of Syracuse Environmental Justice Coalition

Good evening,

My name is Luanne DeFelice. I am here today as a concerned Onondaga County resident. About a year ago, I became aware of the lead poisoning issue in Syracuse through our race awareness group at St. Augustine's Church in Baldwinsville. To say I was shocked is an understatement. Hearing the extent of lead poisoning from paint in Syracuse homes and reading about people's stories in the 2022 Syracuse Community Report not only opened my eyes and head to this issue. My heart was crushed as well!

County and city residents are all connected whether we are consciously aware of it or not.

The hazards of lead paint have been known since the 1970's. The fact that Syracuse has the highest rate of lead poisoning in the United States blew my mind and heart. How could this be! Why is this still an issue here? Why is it affecting a higher percent of children of color? Why are impoverished neighborhoods unfairly affected? How has Rochester decreased their elevated lead blood levels by 90% within a few years of implementing programs there? Why hasn't Syracuse been able to accomplish this goal?

Although there has been some money in the county budget, clearly there has not been enough money, as well as not enough action. Lead poisoning has not been an administrative priority. Overall residents in the county are not getting the full picture of the severity of the problem, nor the challenges we need to confront, from headlines generated by county government's announcements. Residents have been trusting legislators to allocate enough funds, and for the County Health Department to implement programs to test for lead poisoning and offer proactive intervention for those unfortunate to testing positive for lead poisoning.

More of us are aware of the lead poisoning issue here now, and we are unwilling to tolerate the lack of follow through on implementing programs. We are not going to tolerate dismissals of our concerns received from our county health department. We are not going to tolerate landlords who resist acknowledging and correcting unsafe standards in homes they rent. We are not going to tolerate high levels of lead in and around city residents' homes and the water they drink.

Our hearts have been touched deeply by families affected by this preventable childhood disease. It is heartbreaking to think children are so frequently poisoned in our county and will not develop to their full potential because of our insufficient action and landlord negligence. The children and their families deserve better, no matter what their income level or skin color.

I say it again, we are all connected. You as our legislators and we need to do better on conquering this preventable disease! No excuses! This simply cannot be tolerated. Nothing else should take priority or more funding than protecting our children, not to mention their future and ours.

**A statement from Col (ret, USAF) Maureen Golden Murphy, a resident of Baldwinsville, NY,  
and a member of the Syracuse Environmental Justice Coalition**

Good evening. My name is Maureen Murphy, and I am a member of the Syracuse Environmental Justice Coalition. I have been a resident of Onondaga County, Baldwinsville, specifically, for most of the last 29 years. I am retired from the USAF, and served over a third of my 30-year Air Force career in the New York Air National Guard. I appreciate the complexities of building – and executing – a budget that responsibly, ethically, and effectively delivers results to all of your constituents, in this case, all residents of Onondaga County. I'd like to start by saying our coalition sought meetings this past Spring with many of our suburban Onondaga County legislators without result to voice our concerns. However, I'd like to give a quick shout out to Jessica Vinciguerra and Dr. Cody Kelly of the 14<sup>th</sup> District who took the time to meet with us and better understand these concerns.

I have come before you to ask you to examine your hearts and your consciences and **ask if you are truly doing enough to address the urgent childhood lead poisoning crisis here in Onondaga County.** This \$1.55 billion budget allocates \$1.0 million or just .06% of the budget to address the entirely preventable scourge of childhood lead poisoning, down from \$2.5 million or .16% of the 2024 budget. I know we have also been awarded federal grants to address this crisis and you intend to “aggressively pursue” federal grants going forward. However, As County Executive Ryan McMahon has repeatedly stated, “A budget is a statement of values and priorities.” Respectfully, I contend this level of funding is morally outrageous and entirely insufficient for addressing a crisis of this magnitude.

Families for Lead Freedom Now, comprised of families directly affected by childhood lead poisoning, has been advocating tirelessly for years to call greater attention to this tragedy, and yet, Syracuse and Onondaga County now “lead from the rear” in addressing childhood lead poisoning among large Upstate cities. Rochester and Buffalo, working collaboratively with Monroe and Erie County, respectively, and their community partners and school systems, have made far greater progress toward eradicating lead than we have here. I know Onondaga County and I saw how quickly and capably it responded to Covid-19 testing needs – a health crisis affecting all of us – compared to other Upstate counties. After researching this issue, however, I can only conclude that this pernicious lead crisis lingers due to a lack of sufficient and sustained interest, investment, and commitment by our local government. Dedicating .06% of the budget to eradicating wholly preventable childhood lead poisoning does not indicate an “aggressive fight against lead”; it is mere lip service.

Much has been said by Onondaga County officials this past year about the “Lead it Go” program and the mobile testing van, but a closer examination of these programs indicates negligible results. For example, there is no evidence that any the \$250,000 budgeted for “Lead it Go” in last year’s budget was executed. According to Dr. Anderson, program development and staffing amounts to the recent hire of one Social Work Assistant, and the intention to “soon” hire two Community Health Counselors. As for the mobile testing van, data on testing is difficult to find, yet by nearly all accounts, the mobile testing van is being vastly underutilized.

In 2023, 4.5% of children in Onondaga County tested positive for lead – defined as having elevated lead blood levels of 5mcg/dl or higher. However, 9.3% of children in Syracuse tested positive in Syracuse, with rates over 13% in parts of the city, reflecting ingrained health disparities. According to LeadSafe CNY “The Black community of Syracuse is disproportionately impacted by lead poisoning, making this not only a health crisis but also a social, economic and environmental injustice... In 2021, more than 11.6% of Black children in Onondaga County were found to have elevated lead levels compared to 2.0% of White children.” Again, if your children were directly at risk of lead poisoning, would you allocate more than .06% of your budget to eradicate this poison?

Children in pre-1978 housing, especially in high poverty areas with poor housing conditions, are at greatest risk of lead poisoning. Poison lead can be found all throughout a house: in the paint, in the water, and even in the dust. The scope of this crisis is only going to increase as the City of Syracuse recently exceeded the federal lead action level for lead in drinking water, and among the highest recorded lead levels in a large city water system in decades. This should not be a surprise as we have known there are over 14,000 lead service lines bringing drinking water into city homes that must be replaced as the chemical inhibitor is insufficient to the task at this point.

The health impacts of lead poisoning are devastating and can permanently affect a child’s mental, physical, and developmental well-being. Lead in the human body has been found to reduce brain function, impacting the skills needed for academic success, physical activity and social interaction. It can lead to a higher likelihood of attention deficit disorders, criminal behavior, violence and suicide. Shorter attention spans, increased impulsivity, and aggression, are likely to impact a child’s ability to succeed in school, in life, their ability to work, their ability to contribute to society.

The complications of lead poisoning permeate the lives of innocent children, their families, their schools, and undermine all community efforts to help our children succeed in school and go on to develop successful careers and productive lives. Yet, lead poisoning is also entirely preventable if the proper action is taken.”

**If you are not motivated to dramatically increase our efforts at eradicating lead poisoning by the moral argument that it is the right course to take for affected children, perhaps you would be persuaded by the fact that it is the responsible course from an economic perspective.**

Lead exposure among NY children born in 2019 alone is projected to carry an estimated \$6.4 billion lifetime economic burden, over \$1 billion of which will be borne by local governments as a reflection of local conditions and local government decisions. It will ultimately cost much more later to deal with the fallout of NOT doing more now: greater costs for intervention, law enforcement to address increased crime, violence, and incarceration, not to mention the loss of potential economic contributors by creating a permanent underclass of brain-damaged citizens in our county.

When travelling outside of CNY, I am generally proud to tell people I'm from Syracuse – Onondaga County's flagship city, the home of one of my former NYANG bases, our airport, our football team. However, I increasingly see our lack of local government commitment to eradicating lead poisoning as a moral and ethical failure toward the residents of this county, most specifically to our city children and their families, but also to the wider communities affected by their poisoning. Your leadership on this issue will be judged by the investment you make to eradicate childhood lead poisoning and the corresponding development of a strategic initiative to meet this challenge.

So, Save Our Children, set measurable goals, measure and report data and progress, and fund water filters immediately for homes with lead service lines.

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## Funding for Good Life Youth Foundations One MIC Progrsm

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From Anthony Pitts <apitts@gly.foundation>

Date Thu 10/3/2024 6:49 PM

To Jamie McNamara <jamiemcnamara@ongov.net>

**NOTICE:** This email originated from outside of Onondaga County's email system. **Use caution** with links and attachments.

### Good Life Youth Foundation - One MIC Program Report

*Presented to the County Legislature*

Good evening,

I am here representing the Good Life Youth Foundation and its One MIC Program, which has been making significant strides since its inception in January 2020. Our program operates in two districts in Central New York (SCSD, ESM), serving high-risk youth who are involved in the juvenile justice system or are on the brink of entering it.

Our focus is to improve key performance indicators among these students, particularly in their **Behavior, Attendance, and Grades (BAG data)**. I am proud to share that we have seen a **70% increase in attendance** across all the buildings we serve, which is particularly noteworthy in the current climate where chronic absenteeism remains a major challenge in our district.

Beyond attendance, we also focus on long-term success for these students. This past school year, we assisted **7 high-risk youth (Tier II and Tier III)** in successfully graduating from high school. Currently, we are serving approximately **150 high-risk youth**, ensuring they receive the support they need to stay on track both academically and socially.

Our program is funded through a collaborative effort, with **38% of the funding matched by the school district** and **62% provided by the county through state zero-interest refundable funds**. This funding model has been crucial in maintaining and expanding the impact of our services.

We believe that with your continued support, we can reach even more youth in need and help build a stronger, more resilient community.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



*Rich Puchalski*

I am here today to support the efforts to eradicate lead poisoning of our children in our City neighborhoods especially on the south and near -westside where our organization is active. We call on the County Executive, the Health Commissioner, County Community Development and staff that works on this issue to get out and identify children that need to be tested, assist in living in safe housing while remediation is occurring. We demand that absentee landlords should be held accountable to inform their tenants about lead hazards , especially children six and under----efforts need to be made to take landlords that refuse to inform tenants about lead hazards and take no action to eradicate lead from the interior of homes/ apartments. I am here to condemn the County Executive, the County Legislature, Health Commissioner for your foot

dragging in getting our Children tested, and citing  
apartments that violate the City lead laws and getting the  
necessary funds OUT THE DOOR to remove lead ----LET IT  
GO---needs to happen--- YESTERDAY

RICH PUCHALSKI  
SYRACUSE United Weightho

Marianna Pernia

Submission to public hearing transcript

October 3rd county legislature hearing on the 2025 budget

Good evening. Let me start off by adding my name to the growing list of individuals and organizations that are still against the costly aquarium and its now \$100 million price tag.

Spending this kind of tax payer money on an increasingly costly aquarium when Syracuse faces, today, both an unsafe housing crisis and a water contamination crisis is unconscionable.

The county executive may tout business and growth in Onondaga, but the bottom line is that STILL, far too many residents are not seeing the benefits of this growth. Here are the numbers.

In some parts of Onondaga county, in particular Syracuse, one in four children still are lead poisoned in the home. Now as of just a few weeks ago we find out that in addition to lead poisoning from crumbling paint and lead dust in homes still needing remediation, the city of Syracuse is now facing an unprecedented water crisis from lead pipe contamination. Yes, it is similar to the likes of Flint Michigan and Newark New Jersey, and yet you might not be aware of its unprecedented hazard by hearing the rollout of the 2025 budget. Now these same children I mentioned just now and Onondaga residents are now being hit with lead poisoning through both their water and their homes, compounding the effects. As a physician, I want to emphasize here today that there is NO safe level for lead in the body.

Instead of hearing how business is going to 'lift up' the community I would like to hear a lot more specifics, with regards to providing both temporary and permanent, safe housing and providing water that is safe to drink now. I would like to know the Specifics about the Lead it Go program, which have yet to be provided to the public, about a plan to bring back large scale testing such as we had with WIC appointments, I would like to hear about how out of town landlords or property management companies are going to be held accountable for shirking their responsibility and passing the cost to residents in terms of poor health and safety outcomes.

October 3, 2024

Onondaga Legislators,

I have gone through this year's budget and I believe we can do better. From what I see, this is the status quo. Not much change from last year's budget and our problems continue to go unaddressed. We have the highest rate of childhood poverty in the country. Homelessness continues to increase in our community and people have nowhere to go. We will keep managing, surviving but this budget doesn't help us thrive.

I am glad to see Children & Family Services is proposed to get an additional 16 positions. However Children & Family Services and many other departments have a lot of unfilled open positions. What is the county doing to get these positions filled, to retain staff? Does the county pay enough, how are working conditions?

For the last 6 years the county has ended the year with a surplus. Onondaga County has over \$200 million in reserves, 26% of the general fund revenue. 15% is the county's goal for a healthy reserve. You have millions in reserves you could use to fund more services for residents, build housing for people, add additional staff for our board of elections, have consistent hours for our libraries across the county and so much more.

There is nothing in the budget for the aquarium which I find odd but strongly agree not one more penny of taxpayer dollars should go towards it. The latest bid for construction has come in at \$57.4 – \$67.8 million putting the aquarium costs at \$19 – \$30 million OVER budget.

Please cancel the aquarium! It's not too late. We can use the funds that have not been spent yet to build public housing for families! We should not be wasting valuable time and resources looking for private donations of millions of dollars to house fish when we do not have enough housing for people in our own communities! Let's build housing for families with our taxpayer dollars, not a prison for fish!

This legislature can add an amendment to the budget that moves the remaining aquarium funds into a fund to build housing. I hope one of you makes that motion, takes actions to address actual issues facing Onondaga County residents and help us thrive instead of barely getting by.

Thank you.

Elaine Denton  
Manlius, NY