



Onondaga County Legislature

JAMIE McNAMARA
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TAMMY BARBER
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401 Montgomery Street • Court House • Room 407 • Syracuse, New York 13202
Phone: 315.435.2070 • onondagacountylegislature@ongov.net • www.ongov.net/legislature

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE MINUTES – JULY 16, 2025 **CODY M. KELLY, CHAIR**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. McCarron, Mr. Meaker, Ms. Harvey, Mr. Bush

ALSO ATTENDING: Chairman Burtis, Mr. Romeo; also see attached list

Chair Kelly called the meeting to order at 12:31 p.m. and the previous meeting's minutes were approved.

Chair Kelly took the agenda items out of order.

2. HEALTH: Dr. Kathryn Anderson, Commissioner

a. Authorizing Execution of an Intermunicipal Agreement with SUNY Upstate Medical University to Establish an Academic Health Department Partnership

PURPOSE: This memorandum requests authorization to negotiate and execute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with SUNY Upstate Medical University to establish an Academic Health Department partnership that will enhance our capacity to address priority community health concerns through collaborative clinical and academic initiatives.

BACKGROUND: The Onondaga County Health Department faces increasing demands to efficiently engage local expertise in addressing complex public health challenges. Our nationally accredited department serves our community through various programs including disease prevention, health promotion, emergency preparedness, and direct clinical services. To enhance our effectiveness and expand our reach, we seek to formalize a partnership with SUNY Upstate Medical University.

SUNY Upstate Medical University is a comprehensive academic medical center consisting of four colleges (Medicine, Nursing, Health Professions, and Graduate Studies) and University Hospital. This partnership will create synergies between our public health expertise and Upstate's academic resources, clinical capabilities, and research infrastructure.

REQUEST: We request that the Legislature authorize the County Executive to negotiate and execute a Memorandum of Understanding with SUNY Upstate Medical University based on the key terms outlined above. This partnership aligns with our strategic goals of improving population health outcomes, enhancing service delivery, and maximizing the impact of public health investments.

The Academic Health Department model represents an innovative approach to public health practice that has been successful in other communities. By formalizing this partnership, we position Onondaga County as a leader in collaborative public health practice while directly benefiting our residents through enhanced services and improved health outcomes.

PROPOSED PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE

Governance

The partnership will be overseen by an Advisory Committee with equal representation from both parties. The County's representatives will be selected by the Health Commissioner, while Upstate's representatives will be selected by the University President. The Committee will meet regularly to review activities and identify future collaboration opportunities.

Clinical Collaboration Areas

The partnership will focus on several key clinical areas where both parties can leverage their respective strengths, building upon multiple existing collaborations to include:

Current/In Process:

- *Immunization Programs: Coordinated back-to-school immunization campaigns*
- *Lead Poisoning Prevention: Enhanced screening and treatment protocols*
- *Infectious Disease Control: Enhanced STD, tuberculosis, and refugee health programs*
- *Occupational Health: Treatment protocols for blood-borne pathogen exposure*
- *Foster Care Health Services: Specialized care for vulnerable populations (collaboration with DCFS)*
- *Forensic Pathology: Training of pathology residents and fellows, in collaboration with the Medical Examiner's Office*

Future Expansion:

- *Substance Abuse Services: Integrated substance use initiatives and peer services*
- *Mental Health Services: Collaboration between Upstate psychiatry residents and our Division of Mental Health*
- *Maternal and Child Health: Enhanced prenatal and pediatric linkages to care and services*

Academic Collaboration Areas

The partnership will create valuable educational and research opportunities, building upon current areas of collaboration, to include:

Current/In Process:

- *Student Placements: Hosting Upstate students, residents, and fellows in observerships and applied public health activities*
- *Data Sharing: Bilateral exchange of data systems to support evidence-based practice and local preparedness*
- *Basic Research Initiatives: Initial collaborative studies on tick-borne diseases and arboviral research*

Future Expansion:

- *Faculty Exchange: County staff teaching at Upstate and joint research initiatives*
- *Advanced Research Programs: Comprehensive health outcomes research and epidemiological studies*
- *Grant Opportunities: Joint applications for state and federal and other grant funding*
- *Professional Development: Advanced training programs and continuing education initiatives*
- *Publication and Dissemination: Joint publication of research findings and best practices*

BENEFITS TO ONONDAGA COUNTY

1. **Enhanced Clinical Capacity:** Access to specialized medical expertise and residents/fellows to supplement our clinical programs
2. **Improved Population Health:** Coordinated approach to addressing health disparities and complex health challenges
3. **Educational Opportunities:** Professional development for our staff through teaching and research collaborations
4. **Resource Optimization:** Shared resources and expertise to maximize impact of public health funding
5. **Innovation:** Access to cutting-edge research and evidence-based practices
6. **Workforce Development:** Training opportunities for future public health professionals

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The proposed MOU establishes a framework for collaboration but does not commit either party to specific financial expenditures. Any transfer of funds will require separate agreements with appropriate legislative approvals where necessary. All partnership activities will be subject to availability of appropriations and legislative approval where required.

The partnership is designed to leverage existing resources more effectively rather than create new financial obligations. Potential cost savings may result from shared training programs, coordinated service delivery, and joint grant applications.

RISK MITIGATION

The proposed MOU will include several provisions to protect County interests:

- **Termination Provisions:** Appropriate termination clauses for material breach and convenience
- **Compliance Requirements:** All activities must comply with federal, state, and local laws and regulations
- **Insurance and Liability:** Clear provisions regarding liability coverage and insurance requirements
- **Site-Specific Requirements:** Flexibility to maintain our facility and personnel standards

NEXT STEPS

Upon legislative authorization, we will:

1. *Finalize negotiations and execute the MOU with SUNY Upstate Medical University*
2. *Establish the Advisory Committee and schedule initial meetings*
3. *Develop specific collaboration protocols for priority areas as needed*
4. *Begin implementation of identified clinical and academic initiatives*

Report regularly to the Legislature on partnership activities and outcomes

- Goal is not to establish a new department of anything, but is a technical framework that exists across the country
 - Local & State Health Departments work together with academic teaching hospitals and universities to strengthen local preparedness to increase the public health workforce and streamline opportunities to collaborate
- Seeking to formalize this relationship with SUNY Upstate
- Building on ways the Health Dept. and SUNY Upstate already work closely together; examples include:
 - Back to school immunization campaigns with Upstate Pediatric & Adolescent Center (UPAC)
 - Children with EBL (Elevated Blood Level) – work with their physicians and being treated at the hospital
 - DCFS working with UPAC in foster care
 - Substance Use Team is working with physicians to provide peer services to people in emergency rooms
 - Contract with Medical Directors as experts in sexually transmitted infections, tuberculosis, and refugee health who already engage with various programs
 - Engage Pathology Fellows and Residents to train with Medical Examiner's Office
- Goal is to take all of these existing areas where the Health Department and Upstate are working together, with additional potential of areas to work together, and formalize the structure by having an Advisory Board
- Advisory Board would involve reps from both parties that would meet twice a year to help be more prepared locally to pivot and work together quickly in terms of (i.e.) data share agreements and ways to exchange people and resources
- Discussion is not to ask for funds, but for authorization to enter into this agreement for which terms have been laid out

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

- Do any other counties in the state do this?
 - University of Albany and NYS Department of Health
 - PHD students from School of Public Health train in the department
 - Retention of local talent and high impact on public health research
 - Monroe County and University of Rochester have close relationship
- Believe in the previous packet there was mention of early intervention that does not appear in the next one; why?
 - Would explore opportunities to partner with colleges of health professions and across upstate, more of a start up
- Syracuse University has student run speech clinics, and some work being done with Upstate Physical Therapy program
- Great opportunity going forward, because the needs are known and there are kids waiting for services
 - Goal of this would be to increase amount of exposure with local experts in physical therapy, medicine, and public health to get exposure to what public health looks like, what early intervention looks like
- Being able to share data between both parties would be a tremendous support for all the work the county is doing and likewise with Upstate as well
- The relationship between the County and Upstate exists, so the biggest reason for this to happen is to share information
 - It is one of the goals
 - Looking at what these types of agreements look like in other places (website for Academic Health Departments with examples of MOUs)
 - Typically there is an MOU that sets up collaboration framework, like the presence of an Advisory Board
 - It may or may not include data sharing details; how to share data between the two
 - Can be separate agreements on (i.e.) how to handle trainees or research, anything that involves transfer of funds may require additional approval and review
 - Benefit of the details laid out in the memo:
 - Establishing a set group and intention where people from both parties will get together twice a year to discuss how things are going, where to expand, etc.

- Think about processes where currently there are separate agreements with all these different individuals (although some may still remain)
- There may be system wide things to think about and start to formulize
- This cements the relationship together, thinks about the cross cutting themes to streamline, and sets the process in motion to be an entity that exists with accountability and check ins
- Is this about sharing information in the long-term to share data?
 - Believe there will be many different flavors of data that may be shared down the road
 - No intention of routinely receiving identifiable patient to be breached
 - There will be specific details to work out for data sharing – not sure if it will be part of this MOU
- MOU does not bind the county in any way financially, so any expenditures would come back to the Legislature
- Appreciate expecting regular reports/activities with the Academic HD and updates on work being done
- Where do other health providers (i.e. St. Joes, Crouse) fit into this kind of relationship?
 - They would not strictly be part of the Academic Health Department relationship
 - It would not preclude the HD; would want to continue collaborating with (i.e.) Syracuse University
 - Key community partners would not excluded by something like this

A motion was made by Mr. McCarron, seconded by Mr. Meaker, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.

b. INFORMATIONAL: Ann Rooney, Deputy County Executive - Human Services

- Applying for a NYS grant from the NYS Dormitory Authority (due August 15th)
- Children Rising Center (CRC) proposal had lack of site control for process to move forward
- 2 years ago, County Executive's budget committed \$5M to the CRC project and the funds are sitting in a grant account
- Working with Allen Foundation, Early Childhood Alliance, and Blueprint 15 to put all together
- Westhill SD purchased the St. Ann's property adjacent on Onondaga Blvd, and 13204 is one of the most economically challenged zip codes in the County
- County has been working with Westhill for the possible uses for St. Ann's complex
 - Used to be a church, a full school and gymnasium – with plenty of parking and on bus line
- Perhaps this is an opportunity to renovate St. Ann's, take some components that were intended for the CRC and move them into St. Ann's
- Because St. Ann's is owned by a school district, it can only be leased to another governmental entity or used for school purposes, which limits who Westhill can partner with for the rehab/reno of the site
- Have to have site control in order to apply for the grant
- County must have a signed lease with Westhill by the date of submission - 8/15
- If the County does not get the grant, the lease will go away
- County will most likely be applying for \$1-5M with a 20% match from the County
 - Will be able to use the money sitting in the Children Rising Center account
- Anticipate having:
 - A play space like at CRC
 - Activities around early intervention services
 - Family services
 - Potential of having it be a feeding site
 - Turning the old kitchen into workforce development activities with one of the county's human service partners
 - Tying in Westhill High School
 - Have successful programs at CNS and West Genesee where there is a drop in center adjacent to the high school for students
 - Looking to do the same model in the St. Ann's property, as it is right next door
 - If successful, already negotiated a base rent with St. Ann's - want to cover carrying cost at ~\$60,000/year
- Strictly a bricks and mortar application (NYS Dormitory Authority)
- Renovating the complex including plumbing, air conditioning, electrical, flooring, and windows to accommodate children, families, and seniors

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

- Is there a timeline on the grant reward?
 - CE Office:
 - November, County will submit it in August
 - Will go to the Westhill School board on August 4th to approve the lease
 - Will go to the Legislature on August 5th (for the CE to enter into the lease with Westhill)
 - Law:
 - It will depend on the legislative schedule; it might go after session; currently it is the 5th
- Where would the demographic and the geographic location of the population served be?
 - CE Office:
 - (i.e.) The play space in Auburn serves all of Auburn; this would be similar
 - The location primarily focused on would be the people who shop at Western Lights out of 13204 zip code
 - Open to everybody
 - For early intervention services – OT, PT and Speech – those children can come from anywhere in the county
 - For senior dining site, it would be focused on the neighborhood there
- It does not seem to be anywhere near where the original intent was to be to serve a community
 - CE Office:
 - Yes, 100% agree
 - Unique that a SD owns the property, and it is not in bad shape
 - Does not mean that down the road the County would not look at something else if it were to come to pass
 - It would be a missed opportunity to not submit an application for this
- It must be disappointing to the people who have promoted this, that it is not in the community they hoped to serve
 - CE Office:
 - It is disappointing to everybody, whether it is the YMCA; all the pieces that were there
 - This does not preclude the county from participating if able to resurrect the CRC
- Is St. Ann's ok if the County does not get the grant and the lease is null and void?
 - CE Office:
 - It would be a side agreement
 - Law:
 - 100%
 - The lease is being drafted as effective upon grant funding, and it would disappear
 - Lease would be terminated
 - It is contingent upon receiving the grant
- What is the intended use of the building?
 - CE Office:
 - The church building is intended for the play space (pews removed)
 - Adjacent to the front of building will be an outdoor play space (modeled after Auburn, NY)
 - Classrooms used for various activities; pushing in early intervention services
 - Opportunity to have vendor working in classrooms providing the early intervention services
 - Site has big cafeteria and commercial kitchen to have senior dining site
 - A vendor who does meal preparation in the community has a potential interest in using the kitchen for this
 - Because of Westhill High School, teens can walk over

1. **COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH:** Ann Rooney, Deputy County Executive – Human Services
 - a. **Confirming Appointment to the Onondaga County Council on Environmental Health (Jeremy Euto)**

A motion was made by Mr. Meaker, seconded by Ms. Harvey, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



DEBBIE KAMINSKI, Assistant Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature

ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE: **HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE**

DATE: **JULY 16, 2025**

NAME (Please Print)	DEPARTMENT/AGENCY
Jim Beebe	Leg
Ethan LaMontagne	Leg
Kate Anden	OCMD
Wanda Veit	Upstate Medical
Dan Kranz	CE
Ryan Ockenden	LAW
Ben Yaus	
Jason Dean	Finance
Doug Darty	Syracuse
Nicole Watts	Constituent
Ann Rooney	CE
Joe Frateschi	Council
John DeSanti's	Leg
Darcie Lesriak	Leg
Dan Romeo	Leg