



Onondaga County Legislature

HASSINA K. ADAMS
Clerk

NICOLE WATTS
Chairwoman

SPENCER BERG
Deputy Clerk

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE MINUTES – JANUARY 20, 2026 DAN ROMEO, CHAIR

MEMBERS PRESENT: Ms. Denton, Ms. Block, Mr. Romeo, Mr. Kelly

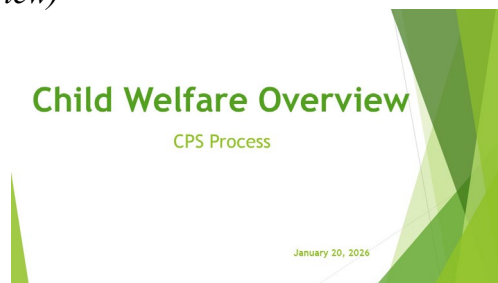
MEMBERS ABSENT: Mr. Burtis

ALSO ATTENDING: Chairwoman Watts, Majority Leader Hernandez; also see attached list

Chair Romeo called the meeting to order at 8:46 a.m. and the previous meeting's minutes were approved.

1. CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES DEPARTMENT:

- a. **INFORMATIONAL** – Child and Family Services (Amy Cunningham, Commissioner; Kelly Varamogiannis, Deputy Commissioner)
 - Commissioner Cunningham and Deputy Commissioner Varamogianius present and presenting: Commissioner Cunningham introduces the activities of the department and current staffing status
 - Deputy Commissioner hands over attached presentation to legislators. Goal is to discuss what work looks like for those working in Child Welfare process. Shares a brief overview of the topic at hand (*Attachment No 1 – Child Welfare Overview*)



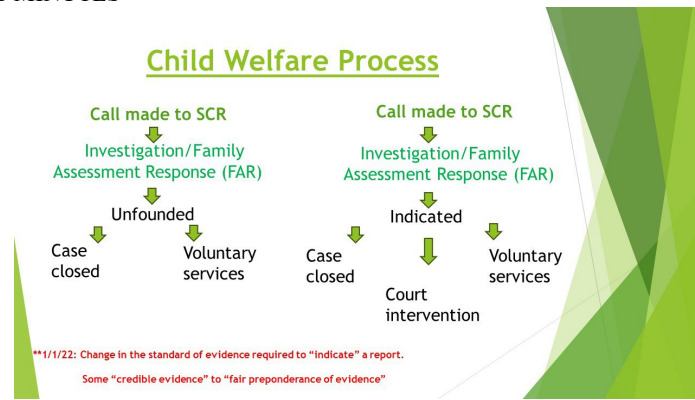
- Discusses the hotline and clarifies changes being made, explains there is a lag in response when a call is made to the child protection hotline. Calls have to go through Albany first
- Changes accounting for conditions of poverty and what is necessarily neglect—especially changes in how school related cases are handled
- Changes to anonymous reporting to help investigators. No longer can a report be filled anonymously,

Questions/ Comments from the Committee:

- Chair Romeo asks whether a person who reports will still be protected information and not divulged
 - Deputy Commissioner answers in the affirmative and makes clear that the protections for individuals who report are strongly protected

Presentation continued:

- Deputy Commissioner continues and begins discussing Family Assessment and Response (FAR) Program. Direct outreach to families, helps families lead in these discussions. Clarifies scope of FAR cases



Questions/ Comments from the Committee:

- Chair Romeo asks if call processing changes in context of FAR, whether it must be specifically asked for
 - Commissioner Clarifies that the decision to use FAR comes from the managing agency, and is mostly restricted by the type of abuse reported
- Chair Romeo inquires further about who handles what cases
 - Commissioner answers that it remains the same and goes on to further discuss how cases are determined. Speaks about changes to “Fair Preponderance” which raises standard for report

Deputy Commissioner Varamogiannis continues her presentation

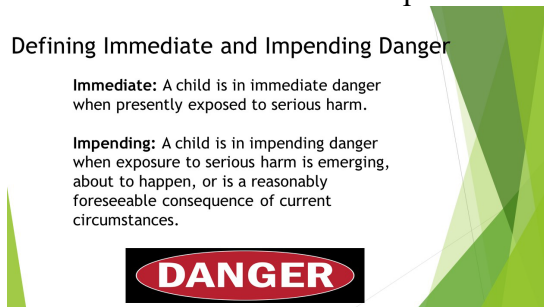
- Commissioner goes on to address misunderstandings about how easy it is to remove children from homes. Clarifies that the primary goal is to keep children with their families and do the best for families. There also must be approval by a family court judge, only if court is not in session can they use emergency powers but in that case they must go to family court immediately. Law Enforcement is empowered to take protected custody of children if there is an immediate threat

Questions/ Comments from the Committee:

- Mr. Kelly asks about what resources are available to case workers to help them with mental health.
 - Commissioner answers that they do provide numerous mental health expertise to their employees

Presentation continued:

- Changes from standard of evidence to “Fair Preponderance of Evidence” which is a higher bar for evidence, in which the majority of all collected evidence must suggest a need for intervention.
- Commissioner continues, begins speaking about Minimal Degree of Care and standard of care in reference to maltreatment. Expresses frustration on the low bar necessary to meet that minimal degree of care, which is that children must be given enough food and liquid to grow. Says that she does not like that and that the workers do not like that. The next topic is about safety and risk



- In Child welfare work the assessment of safety and danger are crucial to decisions. The assessment of risk of abuse and maltreatment
- Discusses CPS investigation process

Questions/ Comments from the Committee:

- Mr. Kelly asks about how repeated calls may be handled, whether each case is treated as a clean slate
 - Deputy Commissioner says that investigative practice is to look at the entire history of reports
 - A review of history is always important
- Chair Romeo asks about how changes to anonymous reporting might affect call volume.
 - Commissioner Cunningham clarifies that only 10% of all reports are anonymous
 - Deputy Commissioner adds that the change will meaningfully help investigations

CPS Investigative Process:

- 
- Initiate investigation within 24 hours
 - Contact source of report
 - Review of history
 - Interviews/collaterals
 - Assessments
 - Determination within 60 days

Presentation continued:

- After every call a 24-hour Safety Assessment is required by law. Investigations must be closed within 60 days, which is not always possible, especially during criminal investigations

Questions/ Comments from the Committee:

- Mr. Kelly highlights that cases may be triaged based on the available info, asks for assurance.
 - The Commissioner answers in the affirmative. Based on the allegations of the case, they will determine next steps. Highlights collaboration with schools
- Chair Romeo asks about how many calls they receive a year
 - Commissioner Cunningham answers 5,000
- Ms. Denton asks how many cases are being managed at one time
 - Deputy Commissioner answers that there are certain times where there are spikes, such as October, due to the time of the year and necessary reporting in regard to schools
- Ms. Block asks about the referral process
 - Deputy Commissioner answers that there's a comprehensive system to help find the best resource.
- Ms. Block asks what follow up looks like.
 - Deputy Commissioner explains that it's unique in each case but follow up includes collateral induvial, families and those involved in the referral process
- Ms. Block asks if there is a standard to how long follow up is
 - Deputy Commissioner answers in the negative

Chair Romeo asks if there are any questions

- Majority Leader Hernandez asks about vacancies in the department
 - Commissioner answers there are 15 vacancies
- Majority Leader Hernandez asks about minimal degree of care
 - Deputy Commissioner explains the law is flexible and written in a way that can be individualized. Commissioner explains intricacy of the law and touches on how training is done in other areas and how changes in the law affect workers
- Mr. Kelly expresses how he see's many parallels to special education

Chair Romeo asks that we continue on the agenda

2. HEALTH DEPARTMENT:

- a. A Local Law Relating to Certain Fees Collected by the Onondaga County Health Department
 - Chair Romeo introduces Commissioner Dr. Kathryn Anderson of the Onondaga County Department of Health
 - Commissioner explains how the Local Law is necessary because there was a clerical mistake in the language used to set the fees. Correct numbers were already passed but not properly filed

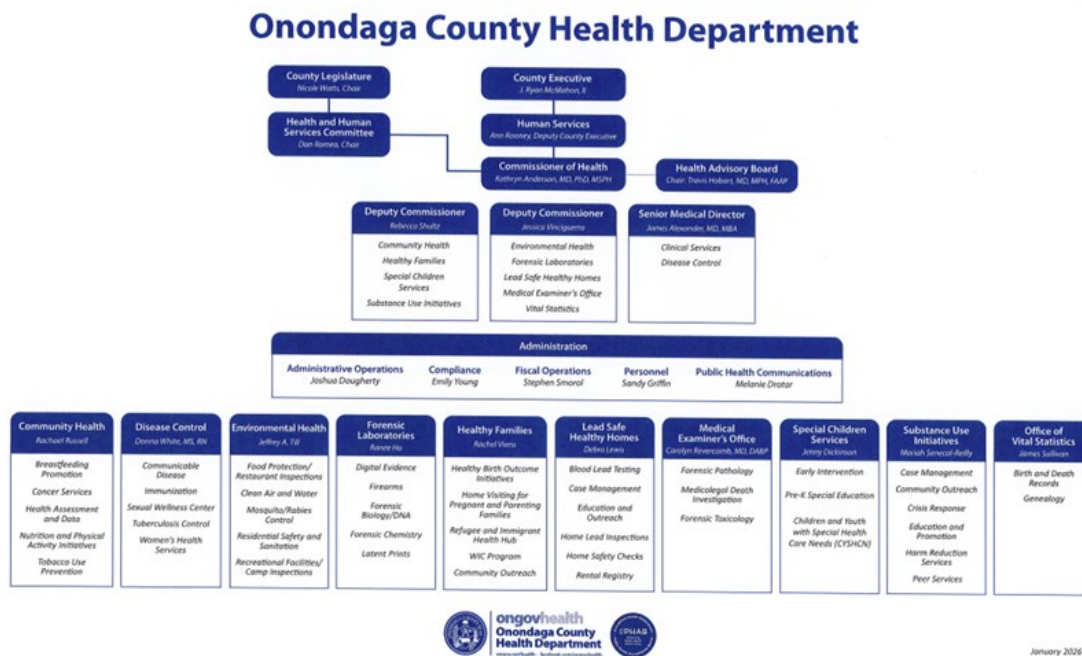
Questions/ Comments from the Committee:

- Mr. Kelly asks that this is fixing the record but should not have any issues with the budget
 - Commissioner Anderson affirms
- Ms. Denton thanks them for the information
- Chair Romeo asks a clarifying question about the School Water testing line
 - Commissioner Anderson and Chief Financial Officer Kristi Smiley addresses question

Chair Romeo requests a motion for a vote

A motion was made by Mr. Kelly, Seconded by Ms. Denton, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED

- b. INFORMATIONAL – Community Health Assessment and Improvement Plan (Dr. Kathryn Anderson, Commissioner)



Community Health Assessment on file with the clerk

- Commissioner Anderson presents about the structure and activities of the Onondaga County Health Department, including key programs. 250 employees, some grant funded, some home grown. Presents a comprehensive overview of the structures.

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

- Mr. Kelly asks about surveillance testing with the lead van

- Commissioner Anderson states they are exploring the best path forward. Requirement from New York State is to have those aged 1-2 get tested, ideally by pediatrician. Some were identified as positive. Worked with legislator McCarron in his district
- Mr. Kelly asks about the geography of the problem and whether it is concentrated at any schools
 - Commissioner highlights the city of Syracuse as the one to be most highly affected
- Chair Romeo asks whether there's any requirement for lead testing to go to school
 - Commissioner answers No

Presentation continued:

- Discuss substance abuse initiatives. Celebrates the decline in overdose deaths, names NARCAN as a primary contributor
- Commissioner moves on to speak about family support programs. Discusses programs such as healthy families, WIC and Health Start. Highlights the disparity in health care for women of color. Also discusses program to assist new Americans

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

- Ms. Denton asks whether federal funding changes have affected the department
 - Commissioner answers there was some area with concerns but no to an extent. There were some issues due to uncertainty but for the most part all funding is intact
- Ms. Denton asks about the budget and timeline of possible effects
 - Commissioner discusses the budget, 10% of Funding is directly from the federal government, and other is pass through funding from the state, so therefore might take time

Presentation continued:

- Commissioner continues to speak about the structure. Such as environmental health. Concludes overview
- Moves on to speak about Community Health Assessment

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

- Chair Romeo asks for a hard copy of the CHIP (Community Health Improvement Program) for legislators
 - Commissioner answers yes. And explains more about what the CHA and the CHIP is
- Deputy Clerk asks what the CHIP stands for the record*
- Chair Romeo asks how obesity is measured
- Mr. Kelly asks about survey techniques and how to ensure the survey is conducted in a way that is represented
 - Commissioner recognizes that and says every year they get better and create a proportional Sample
- Ms. Denton asks about what partnerships are utilized to expand access to the survey
 - Commissioner answers that there are numerous community partners that are utilized
- Mr. Kelly asks about how partnerships are utilized to address problems and set priorities
 - Commissioner answers that they are involved and there are many pushing in the same direction
- Chair Romeo asks how the health department acknowledges and handles the difference in conditions, backgrounds and understanding of health
 - Commissioner highlights the importance of messages being from different backgrounds
- Mr. Garland asks about the Trump administration's freeze of funding of Child Care and other Health Care Funding
 - Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of Onondaga County Ms. Smiley answers and sheds light on proportion of funds coming from federal

- Mr. Garland praises the booklet and asks about suicide rates
 - Commissioner says she doesn't have the numbers but can get them to him
 - Mr. Kelly volunteers and shares the page number with the correct information to Mr. Garland
- Chairwoman Watts asks about tracking and addressing disparities in health outcome
 - Commissioner answers that disparities starts at an early plan. Says that equity is a core tenant of CHIP
- Chairwoman Watts asks who is a part of creating that plan
 - Commissioner answers hospital partners

Chair Romeo asks about any other question, seeing none, moves on to the next agenda item

3. DISCUSSION OF CORRESPONDING OUTSIDE BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

- Chairwoman Watts begins to speak about outside board and appointments. Explains how there are confirmations and appointments and that the goal of the process is that the committee should make a decision about who they believe would be best suited for committees and boards. Resumes are being collected for new roles, and encouraged legislators to put forward people. Also wants these boards to stay in touch. (*Discussed Document is Attachment No.2*)

Questions/Comments from the Committee:

- Mr. Kelly asks about the absence of the Health Advisory Board
 - Chairwoman Watts answers that it is not a comprehensive list of boards
- Chair Romeo says that the draft schedule for his meetings will include these boards

Chair Romeo asks for a motion to adjourn

A motion was made by Ms. Denton, seconded by Ms. Block, to adjourn the meeting. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED

Meeting is adjourned at 10:07 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



SPENCER BERG, Deputy Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature

ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE: HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
DATE: JANUARY 20th, 2026

NAME (Please Print)	DEPARTMENT/AGENCY
Kelly Varamogiannis	DCFS
Amy Cunningham	DCFS
Steve Anderson	OC+ID
Kristi Smiley	Finance
Jeff Tice	OC+O
Jason Dean	Finance
Carl Hummel	Personnel

Attachment No.1
Child Welfare Overview

Child Welfare Overview

CPS Process

January 20, 2026

State Central Register (SCR)

Reasonable cause to suspect

Call to SCR (Albany, NY)

SCR receives report

Report is registered

Report not registered

Report sent to
local district

Report not sent
to local DCFS

Local DCFS initiates
CPS process

LE referral
done
by SCR

No further action
taken

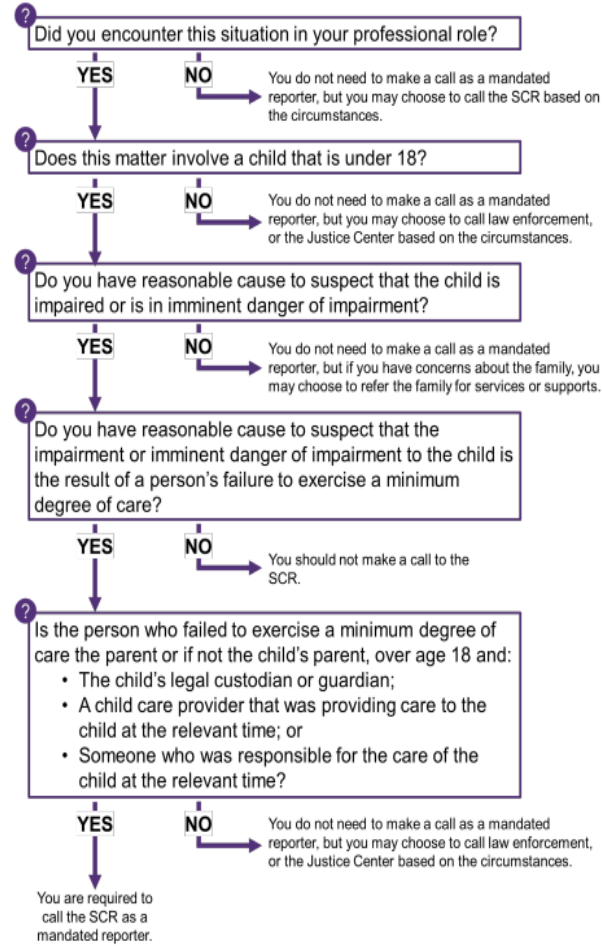
Mandated Reporter: (800) 635-1522

Public Hotline: (800) 342-3720

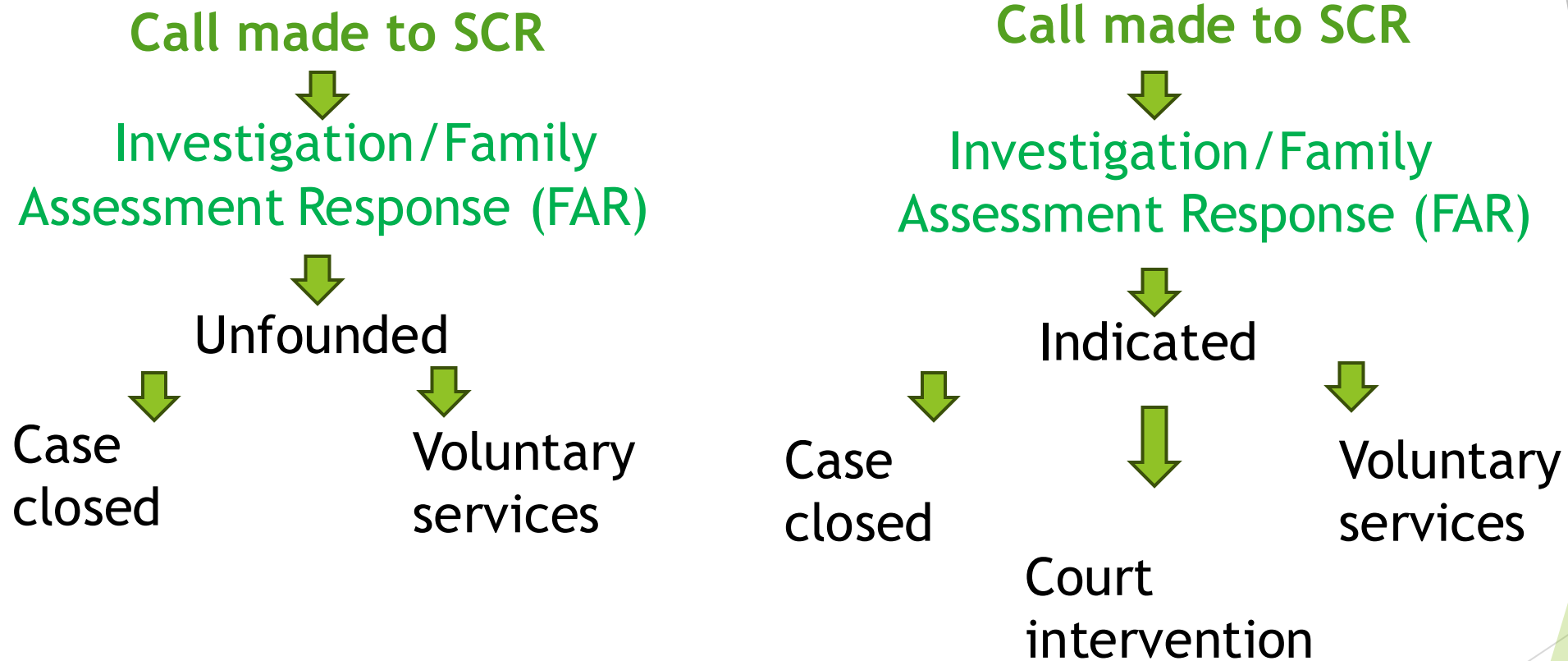
Anti-Harassment in Reporting Act becomes effective in the summer of 2026 no longer allowing anonymous reporting.

Mandated Reporter Decision Tree

Use the below to determine if you should make a call to the SCR. Remember that as a mandated reporter you should answer the questions in the decision tree based on objective facts and information. Please assess whether your own biases may be impacting your answers by reviewing the reflection question on the other side of this page.



Child Welfare Process



****1/1/22: Change in the standard of evidence required to “indicate” a report.**

Some “credible evidence” to “fair preponderance of evidence”

Assessments in Child Welfare

Abuse

Maltreatment (neglect)

Safety

Risk

Defining Immediate and Impending Danger

Immediate: A child is in immediate danger when presently exposed to serious harm.

Impending: A child is in impending danger when exposure to serious harm is emerging, about to happen, or is a reasonably foreseeable consequence of current circumstances.



Definition of Risk

Risk is the likelihood that a child may be abused or maltreated in the future.

CPS Investigative Process:

- Initiate investigation within 24 hours
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- Review of history
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Attachment No.2

Boards and Commissions Discussion

Board/Commission	Appointing Authority	Term Lengths	Board Size	Notes
County Library Board of Trustees	County Executive, Confirmation Required by County Legislature	5 years	11	Current Appointee(s): Sam Edelstein, Mary Bilbo Coughlin, Esteban M. Gonzalez, Svetlana Dyer, Dedaree Dixie (Appointed on 4/2/2024, term expires on 12/31/2028)
County Services Advisory Board/ Department of Mental Health	County Executive, Confirmation Required by County Legislature	2-4 years	15	Appointments under review. No recent appointment actions were identified during the initial review of available records; additional research is underway to confirm current membership and appointment status
Onondaga County Council on Environmental Health	County Executive, Confirmation Required by County Legislature	2 years	9	Current Appointee(s): Jeremy Euto (Appointed on 12/17/2026, term expires on 12/31/2026; additional research is underway to confirm current membership and appointment status
Onondaga County Tobacco Asset Securitization Corporation	County Executive (3); County Legislature (2) by vote of the majority; Confirmation Required by County Legislature		5	Term limits under review. Term limits could not be confirmed based on records reviewed to date. Current Appointee(s): Colleen Gunnip (appointed on 12/17/2024, term expired 12/31/2025), Richard McCarron (appointed on 12/17/2024, term expired on 12/31/2025) Status: Two vacancies
Syracuse/Onondaga County Youth Board	County Executive (10), Chairwoman (1), Confirmation Required by County Legislature	Staggered: 1,2,3-year terms, respectively	24	Appointments under review; additional research is underway to confirm current membership and appointment status
County Veterans Service Advisory Board	Majority Leader (2) Minority Leader (2) Chairwoman appoints (4)	3-year terms	8	Appointments under review. No recent appointment actions were identified during the initial review of available records; additional research is underway to confirm current membership and appointment status
Community Services Advisory Board	County Executive, Confirmation Required by County Legislature	4- year term	15	Current Appointee(s): Lisa Mancini, Sipho Mbuqe, Lynn E. Hopkins (appointed 12/16/2025, term expires 12/31/2027) Elizabeth Nolan, Alexandra E. Punch, Antara Mitra, Mark M. Rusin, Paul M. Joslyn (appointed on 12/16/2025, term expires on 12/31/2028)
Council on The Disabled	Chairwoman	2 years	9	One third of the members shall comprise of disabled individuals or the parent(s) of a disabled child Status Vacant; no current appointments identified in the records reviewed to date.
Emergency Medical Services Advisory Board	County Executive, Confirmation Required by County Legislature	3 years	10-15	Status Vacant; no current appointments identified in the records reviewed to date.