



Onondaga County Legislature

HASSINA K. ADAMS
Clerk

NICOLE WATTS
Chairwoman

SPENCER BERG
Deputy Clerk

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MINUTES – FEBRUARY 17, 2026 **CHARLES GARLAND, CHAIR**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Ms. Block, Mr. Ryan, Mr. Knapp, Mr. McCarron, Mr. Garland, Ms. Hernandez

MEMBERS ABSENT: Mr. McCarron

ALSO ATTENDING: Chairwoman Watts, Mr. Brown, Mr. Bush; also see attached list

Clerk calls the Roll, All Present

Chair Garland called the meeting to order at 1:19 p.m. on February 17, 2026, and minutes were approved.

1. SHERIFF: Tobias Shelley, Sheriff

a. INFORMATIONAL – Overview of the Onondaga County Sheriff's Office

- Sheriff Shelley thanked the committee for the opportunity and provided an overview of the Onondaga County Sheriff's Office.
- The Office has approximately 700 staff divided into four main groups: the Civil Division, which handles the civil process including impoundments and wage garnishments (5%), conducting approximately \$40,000 in business on a typical day.
- There's also the Jail Division, which operates the downtown jail with a large number of beds
 - The Police Division; and Special Operations, including a SWAT team and aviation unit.

Questions / Comments from the Committee:

- Chair Garland asked about the state of staffing.
 - Sheriff Shelley responded that staffing is always a challenge, with approximately 20 current vacancies. He noted the 20-year retirement structure means there will always be recruitment pressure, and that of the approximately 71 candidates being recruited, only about a third will ultimately be eligible. He stated the Police Division received a favorable contract in the fall, making it competitive, but that corrections positions are particularly difficult to fill, as people are less drawn to corrections work than in prior years.
- Chair Garland asked what incentives exist to attract staff.
 - Sheriff Shelley responded that he is not certain there are specific incentives. He noted today's workforce is different – being hired is not sufficient motivation on its own. Even overtime, which is available, is less attractive to today's workforce. He noted the Jamesville facility has become more competitive through a new schedule that has since become a state model, and that modifying schedules and overtime structures has positively impacted sick leave. He emphasized the importance of continued experimentation.
- Chair Garland opened the floor to additional questions.

- Mr. Ryan asked about the status of the downtown jail.
 - Sheriff Shelley deferred to Commissioner of Personnel Carl Hummel
 - Commissioner Hummel stated the committee is expecting a report from the fact finder, which will be used as a basis for negotiation, with the hope of moving it through the Legislature soon. He declined to discuss further details.
 - Sheriff Shelley confirmed the Office is currently negotiating with the union.

- Chair Garland raised a question regarding housing near the correctional facility.
 - Sheriff Shelley referenced prior litigation with this body, and goes on to express frustration and disagreement. Disagrees with the idea that the sheriff only controls the inmates and not the body.
 - Mr. Knapp noted for clarification that there is significant existing housing surrounding the correctional facility and that this is not a new situation. He also noted that much of the surrounding land contains Native American artifacts, and that a farm previously on the site can no longer have its soil disturbed.
 - Sheriff Shelley states 100 of those acres are divided off for the Onondaga nation and brings up a solar farm.
 - A representative from the County Executive's noted that the County and the City of Syracuse jointly issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the site. Due diligence is currently underway. Certain aspects of the building must remain municipal, and the transit center is included in the proposal. The property is jointly owned by the City and the County.
 - Chair Garland confirmed the involvement of Onondaga County.

- Chair Garland asked about the Sheriff's Office's relationship with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).
 - Sheriff Shelley stated the Office has worked with federal agencies throughout his tenure. He noted his position drew national media attention, and that his statement was simply that the Office will follow the law and will only process individuals with a judicial warrant. He stated that if an individual commits a crime, the Office will pursue the case. Overstaying your visa is not a crime but going over the border illegally is a crime.

- Chair Garland asked Sheriff Shelley to explain the term "287(g)," which had been referenced.
 - Sheriff Shelley explained there are two types of 287(g) agreements. One involves signing a 48-hour detainer, which is prevented under New York State law. The second type, through a program "Quantico," allows officers to function as federal agents for approximately six weeks.
 - In cases involving individuals who are criminals, the Office builds a case on probable cause.

- Chair Garland asked about the Sheriff's Office pursuit policy.
 - Sheriff Shelley stated the policy meets the national standard and is based on the totality of the circumstances. He stated the Office does not want to send the message that individuals can travel through Onondaga County running red lights without being pursued, but that decisions are made based on a risk-benefit analysis. He offered an example in which a vehicle passed at high speed; the pursuing vehicle barely observed the car and chose not to pursue, subsequently witnessing a transformer explosion.

- Mr. Brown asked whether in situations where active pursuit does not occur, drones would be used to follow the vehicle.
 - Sheriff Shelley responded that if they know who's in the car possibly. A lot of drugs and guns have been recovered following pursuits. Comments regarding the impact of crime on victims.

- Ms. Hernandez asked whether car theft has increased or decreased.
 - Sheriff Shelley responded that car theft has gone down, attributing it to vehicles being more difficult to steal.
 - Ms. Watts asked, in the context of Micron and anticipated county growth, how new public safety plans are developed.
 - Sheriff Shelley stated the Office looks forward to being involved in those conversations and to reaching out to communities where similar large-scale development has occurred, noting that different types of people commit different types of crime and that the goal is to plan proactively.
 - Sheriff Shelley thanked the committee for their time and noted that the Sheriff’s Office represents a significant expense and is happy to explain why.
- b. 2025 Transfer Resolution (\$1,610,890) (Lisa Dell, Chief Civil Deputy)
- Chief Civil Deputy Dell stated that Sheriff Shelley has tasked her and the other chiefs with examining how the Office can limit overtime.

Questions / Comments from the Committee:

- Chair Garland asked about the mental health component of the transfer and whether the state is reimbursing us.
 - Ms. Dell responded that that state did.
- Chair Garland asked whether there has been an increase in mental health needs.
 - Ms. Dell confirmed that there has been, and the budget has needed to reflect that.

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

2. ONONDAGA COUNTY VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS’ ASSOCIATION: Mike Block, Member of Board of Directors; Warren Darby, President; Mike Caron, Former President

a. INFORMATIONAL – Overview of Volunteer Firefighters’ Association

- Warren Darby, President, thanked the committee for the invitation. He noted the Association recently received additional funding through a grant for a training trailer.
- Mike Caron thanked the committee for the opportunity to present. He noted the Association receives county funding and submits receipts. He stated the mission is fire safety awareness. He asked Legislators to serve as recruitment ambassadors in their towns, noting that television ads and billboards are not effective recruitment tools, and that even one or two new volunteers per town would make a significant difference.
- Mike Block, Member of the Board of Directors, thanked the committee. He stated the Association’s primary focus is fire safety for families and children, noting that tragic fire events can be prevented through training and safety information that is not currently reaching enough of the public.

Questions / Comments from the Committee:

- Mr. Ryan asked about recruitment of city residents specifically, noting there may be an untapped market among city residents who may not identify with a particular town and who would not naturally be drawn to their local volunteer fire department. He asked whether any department members live in the city and volunteer at town departments.
 - Mr. Block responded affirmatively, noting that their department does have members who fit that role. He explained that departments have regulations governing outside memberships, based on a percentage of total membership, which limits how many outside members can be accepted. Once that threshold is reached, a waiting list applies.
- Ms. Block asked what the vast majority of calls are: actual fires or other types such as lift assists.
 - Mr. Darby responded that it is a full range of calls: motor vehicle accidents, fires (including chimney fires during winter), and a growing volume of EMS calls, including fall assists. He noted the department has many trained EMS responders. He stated that they respond to anything and everything that generates a 911 call, and that he does not have a percentage breakdown of fire calls versus motor vehicle accidents versus other types.
- Ms. Block asked whether there is a reluctance among potential recruits who do not want to fight fires but might be willing to volunteer in another capacity.
 - Mr. Darby responded affirmatively, noting that the fire service has evolved. Previously, volunteers were required to begin as interior firefighters. Today, the service needs volunteers of all types, and there is a role for everyone, including those who do not wish to enter a burning structure.
- Ms. Hernandez asked whether the conversation from a few years ago about potentially converting some volunteer fire stations to paid stations, and discussions with New York State about grant funding to support that, is still ongoing.
 - Mr. Darby responded that the Association actually aims to have fewer paid members, as a fully volunteer department saves taxpayers significant money. He acknowledged that some larger towns, such as Fayetteville-Manlius and DeWitt, do have paid chiefs or paid firefighters due to larger budgets. Smaller departments such as those in Mottville, Jordan, and Elbridge do not have the budgets for paid staff.
 - He noted the Association has been exploring tax incentives through the state and LOSAP (Length of Service Award Program) programs. He explained that LOSAP allows a township to place money into an investment account for volunteers, similar to a deferred compensation arrangement, taxable except at the state level, providing volunteers with additional funds upon retirement. He noted that while LOSAP has been successful in some areas, it does not attract younger recruits, for whom retirement is too distant a prospect. The Association is continuing to look for other ways to incentivize younger people to join.
- Mr. Knapp noted that local volunteer fire departments in smaller towns are truly “everything departments.” He offered an example from last summer in Fabius, where a liquid manure truck overturned near a trout stream on Route 80, and firefighters worked to dam the ditch to keep the liquid out of the creek until Soil and Water Conservation arrived. He also noted the county’s large animal rescue program, operated in conjunction with fire departments, citing a recent incident involving a horse that had become trapped in mud.
 - Mr. Block and Mr. Darby agreed, noting that as some local departments dwindle to single-digit membership levels, the prospect of converting to a paid model is simply unaffordable for small towns, as property taxes would become prohibitive. He reiterated that the mutual aid system is critical: when a department has low daytime staffing, mutual aid from neighboring departments fills the gap. He cited an example of a department in central New York that recently closed, noting

the average response time to a house fire in that coverage area is now 35 minutes. He observed that a fire doubles in size every 30 seconds.

- Mr. Knapp noted that while the county is somewhat better situated than the example given, the loss of any department in close proximity is concerning.
- Chair Garland asked about the median age of volunteer firefighters and the minimum age to join.
 - Mr. Block responded that the minimum age is 18, though individuals can join as junior firefighters at age 14 to learn the program before being allowed to respond to incidents. He noted the average age in his department is between 47 and 52. He observed that prior to social media, many more young people sought to join.
- Chair Garland asked how many members are women.
 - Mr. Block responded, using his own department as an example: the department is bonded for 120 members and is currently at 57 members, of whom 28 are active and the others are partially active. Of those, 5 are women.
 - Mr. Darby joked “We do accept women, trust me.” Room Laughed.

Chair Garland thanked the presenters and dismissed them.

3. DISCUSSION OF LOCAL LAW: Nodesia Hernandez, Majority Leader

a. Discussion of Biometrics Data Collection Local Law

- Ms. Hernandez introduced the discussion. She noted the committee is working on a local law that would require commercial establishments to notify customers of the use of biometric identification technology upon entering a store. The law was spurred in part by Wegmans and its approximately eight county locations, though she emphasized the law would not be specific to Wegmans but would apply to all commercial businesses.
- Ms. Hernandez stated she has been in contact with Syracuse Common Council members on this matter. She noted that New York State has since introduced legislation to ban biometric data collection entirely, and the committee is considering whether to follow the state approach of an outright ban versus establishing a local fine structure.
- Outstanding issues include: who within the county would collect civil fines, whether existing staff could absorb that responsibility, and whether to pursue a criminal misdemeanor approach (which she indicated is not preferred). She noted Erie County has a dedicated department for this purpose, and Monroe County is now examining the issue as well.
- Majority Leader Hernandez asks Commissioner of Personnel Carl Hummel whether any existing county position could handle fine collection.
 - Commissioner Hummel responded that no current position is dedicated to this function and that developing a position would require reviewing job specifications and determining staffing levels. None of the current job descriptions would suffice.
- Majority Leader Hernandez stated the committee wants to get this right. She acknowledged the topic has attracted media attention and outreach from the City of Syracuse. She stated that today being local law day, the law will not be written up for this session, but the committee intends to continue working on the enforcement mechanism and monitor where New York State and the City of Syracuse land on the issue. She noted that passing a local law with no enforcement teeth is not the committee’s intent.

Questions / Comments from the Committee:

- Chair Garland asked whether provisions for people who are visually or hearing impaired have been considered, particularly as it relates to the required signage.
 - Majority Leader Hernandez responded that this has been discussed, and that the committee has been exploring ways to address multilingual and accessibility needs. She noted the county is linguistically diverse and the committee would like to ask commercial establishments to include the most relevant languages in the signage at the bottom, so constituents who cannot read English can also understand the notice. She confirmed that Braille and similar considerations are also being discussed.

- Chair Garland noted that while he understands concerns about personal data being sold, technology of this type can also serve to prevent theft, such as in retail settings like Wegmans. He asked whether there are any provisions in the law regarding retaining information on minors.
 - Majority Leader Hernandez responded affirmatively that this is an important consideration. She noted this technology is used at the Landmark Theatre in part to screen for weapons among attendees, and at Destiny Mall to identify known repeat offenders. She stated there are many details still to be worked out, and the committee is depending in part on New York State to lead the way so the county can opt in or out. She reiterated the goal is for constituents to know the county is ahead of the issue and working to protect their privacy.

- Chair Garland asked whether a looped audio message would be required of establishments, noting it could be viewed as intrusive.
 - Majority Leader Hernandez stated that technology is advancing quickly, referencing AI-enabled shopping carts that track purchases and calculate spending. She noted the county needs to put responsibility on commercial businesses to ensure that the technology they purchase has appropriate protections built in. She suggested that if such carts are in use, there should be some mechanism – such as a tactile indicator or audio notification – to make consumers aware. She stated the committee wants to make sure it gets this right and does not feel rushed, despite media attention.

- Mr. Knapp noted this is a situation where technology is a step or two ahead of government and legislation. He commented on the privacy concerns with AI-enabled shopping carts, noting such carts may charge different prices based on demographic data.
 - Majority Leader Hernandez agreed and noted this is a non-partisan issue. She referenced the experience of having her direct deposit account targeted for unauthorized redirection as an example of why constituent data protection matters. She reiterated the intent is to ensure that businesses post signage so constituents know when they enter a commercial space that their biometric data may be collected or sold. She referenced Erie County’s model as instructive. She stated Monroe County and the City of Syracuse are now engaged on the same issue, and she hopes for a coordinated approach.

- Chair Garland shared that over Christmas, he received a call from the Cottage Grove, Minnesota Police Department advising that they had arrested an individual in possession of a check from Garland Brothers Funeral Home for \$3,000. Upon checking his account, Chair Garland discovered that checks totaling \$8,000 had been fraudulently drawn. He noted the experience of realizing the fraud on Christmas Day, when all institutions were closed, was extremely stressful. He stated the family was ultimately able to recoup some of the money. He noted his account had been compromised through what appeared to involve the Royal Bank of Canada.

- Mr. Knapp also shared that he recently received a fraudulent email solicitation that accurately named local organization officers, requesting financial assistance on behalf of a treasurer purportedly stranded out of the country – a sophisticated AI-generated scam.
- Chair Garland referenced Jonathan Swift’s writing in Gulliver’s Travels on the subject of fraud.

4. DISCUSSION OF CORRESPONDING OUTSIDE BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS: Nicole Watts, Chairwoman

a. Review and Discussion of Appointments to Outside Boards

- Chairwoman Watts stated that, as promised at the previous committee meeting, she wanted to return with an update on outside boards and commissions. She explained that the Chair of the Legislature can put forward nominees who are then voted on in session, but she expressed hope for a more participatory process going forward. She noted that outside boards and commissions have been connected to their corresponding standing committee, and that for the Public Safety Committee there are several to highlight.
- Chair Garland expressed interest in serving on the Criminal Justice Advisory Board.
- First, the Onondaga County Justice Center Oversight Committee: appointing authority is mixed. The committee approves all appointments. A number of members have continued to serve beyond the expiration of their terms without formal renewal. The committee will need to revisit these positions to either renew current members’ terms or appoint replacements. Chairwoman Watts noted that specific names have not yet been put forward; she is bringing these to the committee’s attention as vacancies or positions overdue for attention. She referenced the specific expiration dates identified: Marissa Joy Mims (2021), Jeffrey Marrier (2022), and John Fowge (2024), among others.
- Second, the Onondaga County Fire Advisory Board: members are currently in good standing. The majority of terms expire December 31, 2026. The committee should begin preparing to identify who will fill those positions for the upcoming year.
- Third, the County Jury Board: this position requires a County Legislator and was previously held by Legislator McCarron. The committee must either reappoint Legislator McCarron or identify a new designee.
- Fourth, the Criminal Justice Advisory Board: this position was previously held by Legislator Olson. As Legislator Olson is no longer serving, this is an actively open vacancy requiring prompt action. She indicated the committee could waiver a resolution into the March 3rd session if a name is identified. She requested the committee submit names and indicated that a document prepared by the Deputy Clerk and legislative interns detailing each board, current members, and vacancies would be distributed to committee members.
- Chairwoman Watts stated that for submissions, and in adherence with open meetings law, committee members should email both herself and Chair Garland with any resumes or names, which will be collected and shared. She noted names can be submitted generally but that resumes and additional information are preferred to facilitate evaluation.

A motion was made by Mr. Knapp, seconded by Mr. Ryan, to adjourn. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:26 p.m.



SPENCER BERG, Deputy Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature

ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE: PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
DATE: FEBRUARY 17th 2026

NAME (Please Print)	DEPARTMENT/AGENCY
Toby SHELLEY	SHERIFF
LISA DELL	SHERIFF
Mike Caron	OCVFA
Warren DeJoy	OCVFA
Mike Block	OCVFA