



NEWS

RENSSELAER COUNTY LEGISLATURE

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BIPARTISAN AGREEMENT ON COUNTY JAIL ISSUES

Members of the Democratic Minority of the Rensselaer County Legislature are pleased that County Executive Kathy Jimino has agreed to prepare and submit a shared services grant application to study the feasibility of converting the McGregor or Hudson state correctional facilities into a regional facility for counties. Jimino signed the Democratic-initiative on Friday. In addition, Assemblymen Roy McDonald and Tim Gordon have publicly expressed support for the reuse of the two state correctional facilities.

The Democratic Minority had asked for the support of the County Executive and the Legislative Majority for their proposal as part of the plan for moving forward with the expansion of the County Jail.

According to Minority Leader Ginny O'Brien, "This is a step forward toward a regional approach to corrections that could save taxpayers' dollars."

"Many state and local elected officials have complained about this issue. We have worked to come up with a viable alternative that creates a win-win for the state, counties and most of all, the taxpayers of Rensselaer County," noted Deputy Minority Leader Keith Hammond.

According to Hammond, "The Majority's inability to muster enough votes to pass the \$12.5 million bond in December and February, at the same time that the state announced plans to close area state correctional facilities, gave us a window of opportunity."

Democratic county legislators met with state officials who suggested submitting a grant to study re-use of the state facilities. Brian Zweig, who attended that meeting said, "Developing a regional approach to address targeted jail populations, such as inmates with mental illness or substance abuse issues, was one idea that might help counties reduce costs. State officials were supportive of this kind of proposal," stated Legislator Brian Zweig.

"There is already a model for such a regional facility in the regional juvenile detention facility. This is an excellent opportunity to explore how we can save costs down the road through a regional approach to housing inmates. Counties cannot continue to foot skyrocketing correctional costs alone," said Legislator Flora Fasoldt.

For several years Rensselaer County has been under orders from the State Commission on Correction to expand its jail. The State has issued temporary variances permitting the County to double-bunk its inmates but the county has still been spending \$1.5 million each year to house prisoners in other counties. The Rensselaer County Jail expansion is estimated to cost \$50 million to add 196 beds to the existing jail.

After the current expansion is implemented and the variances are removed, there will be a net gain of only 27 beds, however. "We need to start looking at alternatives now or we'll have to go back to taxpayers for money to expand the jail again," said Legislator Kevin Harrington, a member of the Legislature's Judiciary Committee.

The Rensselaer County Legislature approved an additional \$12.5 million for the jail expansion at its March 11th monthly meeting.