



Inclusion Through Diversity

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Comments on Youth Services Funding Dominate Community Budget Forum

Legislators tonight were urged to preserve funding requests to support county youth services programs, as the Legislature held its annual Community Budget Forum on the 2014 Recommended County Budget.

About 60 people attended the forum, and nearly half of them spoke. The vast majority of speakers urged Legislators to support over-target requests submitted as part of the Youth Services budget—15 of the speakers urging that a nearly \$21,000 request to fund the One-to-One Big Brothers Big Sisters program be restored, that request for additional funds to support coordination of countywide mentoring services. Many speakers—including parents, children, and those who have served as a big brother or big sister—offered moving personal stories about how the program has impacted their lives and the lives of others.

Allen Green, who still serves the Ithaca Youth Bureau after many years as its director, told Legislators that “unrelenting deep cuts” in funding have forced the program to focus services on where participants live, not on those of greatest need, and he maintained that it would be “fiscally irresponsible” not to take advantage of this important community resource for children at risk. Big Brothers Big Sisters coordinator Joe Gibson also asked the County to stop the “slow erosion of funding” to the program, \$80,000 over the past five years, which he said in many ways is taking the program to the “breaking point.”

Other speakers urged restoration of funding for the Advocacy Center youth program and 4H Urban Outreach. Kathy Gehring, of the Youth Services Resource Allocation Committee, called upon Legislators to grant all Youth Services over-target requests that had been advanced through her committee.

Four who spoke voiced their support for requiring County service contractors to pay employees a Livable Wage, and maintained that something should be done as part of the 2014 budget. Pete Meyers, of the Tompkins County Workers Center, suggested that a recommended \$115,000 increase in the County’s contingency fund might be targeted toward this purpose. Budget Chair Jim Dennis responded that, while there is not a line in the budget specified for the Living Wage, the County continues to work to address the issue and action will be forthcoming before year’s end.

Don Trotter presented a resolution from the Board of Directors of the Friends of the Tompkins County Public Library, thanking the Legislature for its support of the library in difficult times and applauding the proposal to increase Library funding in the 2014 budget.

The administrator’s budget, with total expenditures of \$170.2 million and local dollar spending of \$81.6 million recommends a 3.54% rise in the tax levy and would increase County property taxes by \$21 for the owner of an average \$163,000 home.

Legislators meeting as an Expanded Budget Committee will begin recommending modifications to the administrator's budget when they reconvene Monday, October 21 for the first of three scheduled voting meetings. The 2014 Recommended Budget and other budget information are posted at the budget page of the County web site at <http://tompkinscountyny.gov/ctyadmin/Budget/index>.

There are ongoing opportunities to comment on the budget as the process moves forward. Citizens are invited submit budget comments online at the County web site budget page, and are also encouraged to visit the County's Facebook page on the budget. Written comments can be mailed to the Legislature Office at the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building, 121 E. Court Street, Ithaca.

Citizens may address legislators on the budget at the beginning of any County Legislature meeting and at the Legislature's formal budget hearing November 12. All budget meetings, including the hearing, take place at Legislature Chambers in the Governor Daniel D. Tompkins Building (Second Floor).

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital, and Personnel Committee, 387-4058.

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