



# COLUMBIA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FROM: BOARD OF SUPERVISORS CHAIRMAN MATT MURELL

## **EFFICIENCY THE GOAL IN PROPOSED COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT BUDGET CHANGE**

"The statement made last week by the Columbia County Democratic Chairman in which he claimed that county Republicans were attempting to defund the county Sheriff's Department to the tune of \$250,000 is not true," said Columbia County Board of Supervisors Chairman Matt Murell today.

"Instead, it is a proposed transfer of specific Emergency Management funds designed to establish it as its own department, and not a reduction of funds. This transfer does not affect people's safety whatsoever and does not affect the Sheriff's Office one bit," added Chairman Murell.

The operating budget designated specifically for Emergency Management is between \$139,000-\$140,000. In the proposed transfer, \$65,000 will stay with the Sheriff's budget, as these funds cover software maintenance agreements utilized by various programs in the jail, civil and law enforcement areas.

The remaining \$70,000+ would transfer with the county Emergency Management Office. Any grant budget lines are applied for and used strictly for what they are awarded for -- this cannot and does not change.

"There is no defunding of anything as the funds will continue to be used as already designated," said Chairman Murell. "The budget lines that will transfer with the Emergency Management Office are already designated specifically to Emergency Management in the Sheriff's budget, and will not change."

The fact that the Columbia County Emergency Management Office currently operates under the umbrella of the county Sheriff's Office actually adds a second, and unnecessary, bureaucratic layer to the process in the event of an emergency.

Article 2B of the NYS Executive Law is clear: The Chairman of the BOS (or county executive) bears ultimate responsibility for such things as declaring a countywide state of emergency. New York State requires that the county Board of Supervisors chairman or county executive complete emergency management training and refresh every year.

### **Efficiency at Time of Crisis**

Establishing the county Emergency Management Office as its own department, in turn, establishes an efficiency that does not now exist in times of crises. As its own department, the director of the Emergency Management Office reporting solely to the county Board of Supervisors chairman during large countywide events (such as the pandemic) rather than two separate offices streamlines the process.

All county level emergency coordinators (who are not part of county Emergency Management), such as the Fire Coordinator, EMS Coordinator and 911 Director have been contacted for their opinion on the proposed move to establish county Emergency Management as its own department. All approved the move as a way to make Emergency Management more efficient. Under the proposed new structure, Emergency Management would now answer to the Full Board of Supervisors, as does 911, Fire and EMS.

“This move is something that has been discussed in the past with the outgoing Sheriff and would have happened whether or not Sheriff Bartlett had won in November’s election,” said Chairman Murell, in addressing comments suggesting the proposed move was generated by political retribution.

For its part, Columbia County Emergency Management Office is a busy, part-time department of five that prepares for the worst and hopes for the best while remaining available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Much of its work is done in the background.

The county Emergency Management Office stresses continual preparedness, both on the governmental level as well as with county schools and Columbia-Greene Community College, and, in some cases, private businesses, such as nursing home facilities and the Tennessee Gas Pipeline in Malden Bridge. Further, the CCEMO applies for and oversees emergency preparedness grants for the county.

Also, it is responsible to maintain the county’s continuation of operations plan, which is part of the comprehensive emergency plan. Emergency Management also works with the American Red Cross should a large-scale incident require shelter, and the Columbia-Greene Humane Society in the event such an incident require the shelter of animals.

### **Call for Special Meeting**

“Moving forward,” said Chairman Murell, “I would like to recommend that the Board of Supervisors schedule a special meeting in December to discuss the proposed transfer and to answer any and all questions. This would include the Sheriff-elect.”