

**SPECIAL MEETING
OF THE
PUTNAM COUNTY LEGISLATURE
CALLED BY THE CLERK AT THE REQUEST OF THE CHAIR
HELD AT
TILLY'S TABLE AT TILLY FOSTER FARM
100 NY 312
BREWSTER, NEW YORK 10509**

Thursday March 7, 2024 7:00 P.M.

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 P.M. by Chairman Jonke who requested the Putnam County Civil Air Patrol to present the colors. Chairman Jonke requested the Putnam County Sheriff Kevin McConville lead in the Pledge of Allegiance and Legislator Addonizio lead in the Legislative Prayer. Upon roll call Legislators Montgomery, Gouldman, Addonizio, Nacerino, Ellner, Castellano, Sayegh, Crowley and Chairman Jonke were present. Also present was Legislative Counsel Firriolo.

Chairman Jonke introduced Personnel Director Paul Eldridge who recognized the Elected Officials present at the State of the County meeting.

Chairman Jonke introduced County Executive Kevin Byrne to present the 2024 State of the County Address.

County Executive Byrne thanked Chairman Jonke and presented the (attached) 2024 State of the County Address.

Chairman Jonke thanked County Executive Byrne for his presentation. Chairman Jonke asked if any members of the Legislature had any questions they would like the County Executive to address.

Legislator Montgomery thanked the County Executive for providing the comprehensive annual report before this meeting. She stated that it was obvious that the Administration worked very hard on it. She questioned if the County had a fund balance policy. She stated that we are carrying an \$86.9 million fund balance in addition to over \$30 million in cash. She questioned how that was in relation to daily expenses or recommendations on how much of a fund balance we should be carrying. She questioned if it was excessive.

County Executive Byrne stated that there is the general fund balance and those that are assigned to certain accounts. He stated that he could certainly speak to the Commissioner of Finance and provide a more detailed answer to that question.

There being no further business, at 8:19 P.M., Chairman Jonke made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Legislators Ellner and Nacerino. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Diane Schonfeld, Clerk.



Putnam County Executive Kevin Byrne

Special Presentation of the 2024 State of the County

Thank you for joining us for this special presentation of the 2024 State of the County. Your presence is a testament to your commitment to the nearly 100,000 people who call Putnam County home. Each of you here have contributed to our county's success, as well as its robust and rich past.

At the center, is a core group of people this Administration relies on often. Deputy County Executive James Burpoe, Matt Covucci our Chief of Staff, Chris Formisano our Director of Communications, Jen Carusso who serves as our Director of Compliance and Intergovernmental Relations, Lisa Ranghelli our Confidential Secretary, and the newest addition to our team, Barbara Reitz, who continues to serve our entire County in numerous capacities.

I also want to start by recognizing all who helped with the behind the scenes work that enabled us to put this presentation together: Thank you, again, to our Executive Office staff, our remarkable county employees from IT, DPW who helped set up for tonight's special event, the Legislature and its staff for holding their special meeting this evening at this location, and of course our great hosts here at Tilly's Table within our own beautiful Tilly Foster Farm, one of Putnam's frequented and renowned County Parks.

Utilizing County Facilities

Many residents and visitors to this county facility know it is a place of great beauty, great food, and great joy. While it was County Executive Bob Bondi and the Legislature in 2002 that secured this property to preserve it, more recently it was our previous County Executive Mary Ellen Odell and members of the Legislature who were instrumental in turning this property into what it is today- and it has become a great success. But this space is so much more than a County property with a restaurant, a concert venue, or a home for a couple of horses; it is preserved space that supports family friendly activities, and perhaps most importantly, it is a center of education and learning. It is literally a school. I know a lot of folks in this room already know this, but it's worth restating because many residents would be surprised to know that Putnam Northern Westchester BOCES continues to teach multiple culinary classes here at Tilly's Table for students.

One of those classes that is near and dear to my heart is the Food Service Transition to Work course, which allows students with special needs to learn about the culinary industry in a direct hands-on manner, gaining that real world experience that is invaluable for anyone, but especially for those individuals living with disabilities, a population that faces a nation-wide 80% unemployment rate. This is just one of the many ways Putnam County is working to ThinkDIFFERENTLY about all the populations we serve, AND one example of how we are committed to thinking differently about how we utilize our county resources, making them welcome to all.

Our Buruea of Emergency Services Center is a critical facility for our 911 dispatch operations, the Emergency Operations Center, and Emergency Medical Services, but it is also a community space for trainings, presentations, town halls, and just a few weeks ago, our first ever County Career Expo. Which, by the way, was a huge success. Thank you to all our Putnam County departments who participated, chief among them our Personnel Dept., we had over 200 individuals attend to learn about some incredible employment opportunities here in Putnam County Government. It was so successful that our personnel department is already planning a second Career Expo for later this year, and we're expecting to invite partners from all over the county to set up shop, expanding the footprint even further.

The Putnam County Golf Course is another great asset of this county, but it isn't just an incredible public golf course that residents enjoy for affordable outdoor recreation. It's where our Office of Senior Resources hosts all of its holiday Senior luncheons, it's where our incredible Department of Health hosts its annual Food Operators Seminar, which in 2023 returned to an in-person event for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 120 individuals attended this unique educational event.

Last year, the county golf course was also identified by the Department of Health and the Buruea of Emergency Services as the location for an alternate Emergency Operation Center should something ever happen to our primary facility. We even conducted a full EOC activation drill at the golf course. And later this year, our Board of Elections will be utilizing the golf course as an early voting location during the Presidential Election. These are just a few of the ways we are actively working to utilize county owned properties differently, always for the betterment of our residents.

Many of our neighboring counties have similar, but notably larger and more costly, facilities such as Westchester's Convention Center, their public golf courses at Hudson Hills and Saxon Woods, Muscoot Farm, or Dutchess County's Stadium, where our neighbors host all sorts of recreational and entertainment activities. Our facilities are unique and often have more limited uses. Here, we work diligently to ensure our facilities are properly maintained and that they are utilized appropriately to maximize their potential for, first and foremost, our Putnam County residents.

That's why I'm pleased to share that our team is actively working to embrace cutting edge ways to encourage more cashless options at these facilities, bringing us into the 21st century. This will allow us to improve record keeping, financial controls, as well as convenience for our visitors.

There are limitations with how we contract out services with some of these facilities, and that's largely due to some specific federal restrictions that date back to the acquisition of the Putnam County Golf Course through the use of tax-exempt bonds. Still, that has not stopped us from fulfilling our obligations to maintain and operate these facilities to their full potential. We do this as we look forward to embracing future opportunities that would permit Putnam County to pay off this debt and have greater flexibility with how the County can manage these contracts.

Regardless, when it comes to the Putnam County Golf Course and Tilly Foster Farm, as we preserve these protected spaces, we continue to do our best to think outside the box, to encourage more family friendly activities, and to embrace new, creative ideas in order to more directly benefit our taxpayers.

Youth Business Market

One such idea this Administration is planning to roll out spurs from a conference I attended in 2023 where I observed how state, county and local governments were responding to a series of controversial enforcement actions against children selling lemonade. Yeah... Lemonade stands, right? It happened in Ohio, as well as in upstate New York where a child's lemonade stand was shut down because they didn't have the proper permit, they weren't collecting sales tax, and a bunch of other bureaucratic nonsense. I thought to myself, seriously? This is crazy. Well, fortunately, several organizations have since stepped up offering a response to this craziness...

And so tonight we're announcing that on June 9th, we'll be holding our own Youth Business Market right here in Putnam County. And what better place than Tilly Foster Farm. We're going to get it done. Taking inspiration from the Children's Entrepreneur Market, led by our Youth Bureau Director Janeen Cunningham, with support from our Putnam County Team and community leaders, we're excited for this new opportunity that will ensure Putnam County is a place that encourages the next generation of entrepreneurs, and that demonstrates to people of all ages that we are open for business. And, we're going to do it, as we continue our commitment to Think Differently, by ensuring there is accommodation for those with developmental disabilities so they too can participate. You can learn more at PutnamCountyNY.com/YBM

Perhaps, you can see why I am so excitement for what lies ahead this year, but it's also important that we take time to reflect, recognize and celebrate Putnam County's many accomplishments from 2023.

Finance Review

2023 was a banner year for Putnam County. Together, in the first year of this administration, we accomplished a lot. I continue to be incredibly proud to work alongside the men and women

who serve in Putnam County Government. Have no doubt, the state of our county is strong... and that is in large part due to the hardworking, dedicated individuals, that go to work every day to serve our residents. Please join me in giving them all a big round of applause.

Now, let us start our review of the State of our County with an eye toward our finances and overall financial strength. Last year, I promised that we would strive to do better, to make county government more affordable, accountable, and accessible - and we delivered.

The 2024 County Budget strengthened services, expanded mental health support, invested in critical infrastructure, and bolstered our property tax stabilization fund, all while still managing to: reduce the overall tax burden in the budget for the first time in 25 years, cut the property tax rate to its lowest level in 15 years, and reduce sales tax to make it fairer and less regressive. And we did it all with no new borrowing, while preserving the county's AA1 bond rating from Moody's. Special acknowledgment goes to our Commissioner of Finance Mike Lewis, for his help, dedication and persistence in achieving these remarkable accomplishments.

That's in addition to the tax relief we provided to our volunteer emergency service providers. If you recall, right out of the gate, in 2023 we worked with the Legislature, especially Chairman Jonke, to provide our volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers with a 10% property tax exemption to not only recognize their service, but to assist with recruitment and retention. As a former Assemblyman, I helped pass the state's enabling legislation in 2022, when it was spearheaded by then Assemblyman, now Congressman, Mike Lawler. By supporting the continued success of our Volunteers in emergency services, this exemption pays for itself by limiting the need for more costly municipal services which would otherwise be staffed by paid government employees.

The 2-year elimination of sales tax on clothing and footwear under \$110, began just a few days ago on **March 1st** and lasts till March 1st, 2026. To all our residents, that means that clothes or shoes you buy online or at any store in Putnam County, will have a 4% discount- completely eliminating the sales tax. That means, finally, it's cheaper to buy right down the road at Marshalls, than it is to go to Dutchess, Westchester, or Danbury.

I recognize that to the majority of our residents, this sales tax cut is not going to make or break your individual budgets. But as we live within this time of economic uncertainty, with inflation still running rampant, and increased costs of everyday goods, it is up to us as public servants to find ways (no matter how small they may seem) to provide financial relief when possible and operate within our means. We do this by practicing fiscal discipline, prioritizing spending, seizing opportunities for cost savings, and ensuring we are prepared for the financial challenges that may lie ahead.

At the onset of last year, this Administration saved over \$100,000 by restructuring budget lines, personnel, and centralizing responsibilities within the County Executive's Office. These savings are still being realized, but we didn't stop there. I'm pleased to share that additionally, just

within the County Executive's office, we were able to lead by example and close out the fiscal year \$111,000 under budget.

This Administration will always work to be responsible in addressing the overwhelming tax burden that county residents, and New Yorkers in general, bear every day. There are many national, state-wide, and regional factors that can either strengthen or hinder our opportunities to foster economic growth and provide tax relief. Inflation continues to be driven by a post pandemic economy, high energy prices, as well as numerous other decisions made at other levels of government. In many ways, this is why we must rely on our federal and state representatives to be our strong advocates and allies to serve as our voice of reason in Washington and Albany.

Unfunded Mandates

We recognize and thank all our federal and state representatives, U.S. Senators Schumer and Gillibrand, Congressman Lawler, state Senators Harckham and Rolison, as well as Assemblymembers Slater and Levenberg, but as the state's budget process takes shape, we must ask them to step up and assist us yet again.

Last year, Putnam County was forced to compensate for the loss of federal Medicaid dollars, known as eFMAP, which should have passed through the state to the county in order to support our most vulnerable populations. Our state representatives pushed back when Albany had sought to out-right steal funds from county governments across the state. However, ultimately, the State Legislature was forced to swallow a painful compromise that phased out the funding over a period of several years—and with no means of recourse, county governments were forced to swallow it as well. That equated to \$1.5 million in lost funding that should have gone to our most vulnerable. Thankfully, due to our County's financial strength and thoughtful fiscal management, we worked with the County Legislature to make those programs whole in our 2024 Budget and, together, ensured that Albany's cut did not equate to a reduction in services in Putnam County. Still, this new State practice sets a troublesome trend. I ask our partners at the federal and state level to stand up against any renewed attempt by Albany to claw back the cap on the local share of Medicaid costs, and to continue the fight to restore eFMAP funding for county governments. In New York, unlike many other states, county government manages and implements the Medicaid program. It is unfair to siphon away federal Medicaid dollars that were intended for those who implement these programs that serve our most vulnerable.

There is also the matter of state funding for our local roads. Earlier this year, in her executive budget, Governor Hochul proposed a massive cut to the Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program, also known as CHIPS. As it stands, this would be a \$60 million cut statewide. Putnam County as well as the overwhelming majority of its towns and villages rely on

this funding to pave and maintain the roads within our transportation system. Last year, Putnam County received \$1.2 million from CHIPS that was directly used to resurface county roads. The village of Cold Spring relies heavily on CHIPS, with more than 50% of its highway maintenance funding coming from this state program. Any cut to this funding would be unmanageable and cause significant stress to county, town and village budgets.

It is for this very reason that I drove up to our state's Capitol in February to provide testimony on behalf of Putnam County before the State's Budget Hearing on Transportation. Our testimony highlighted the importance of CHIPS and numerous other outstanding needs within our Region of the state's Department of Transportation. I'm hopeful that between our direct advocacy, and the advocacy from our state legislators, that we will receive the full amount of CHIPS funding we've come to rely on. In fact, our state representatives have already proven effective in ensuring Putnam County is not forgotten when it comes to our state roads. While we know more work is always needed, we do appreciate that with the support of Assemblyman Slater, Senator Harckham, Supervisor McGlasson & Highway Superintendent Othmer, significant improvements to Rte 52 in the town of Kent were realized last year, with more work now scheduled to complete the resurfacing of Rte. 52 to the Dutchess County line, next year.

Another familiar challenge we face from the State dates back to last year's proposed state budget, when the Governor proposed a scheme to wrestle away local control of zoning in an attempt to force massive construction of affordable housing complexes around transportation hubs and Metro-North stations. Her administration's poorly conceived plan was resolutely rejected by the state Legislature. However, she's now made it abundantly clear that this year she's going to try to force the issue by devising a new plan that would withhold previously available economic development dollars from towns, villages, and cities that don't comply with her low-income housing vision. This entire situation is untenable and unacceptable.

We need our state reps to keep pushing back against this type of overreach and resistance to local decision making. While there seems to be no current threat to county funding from this proposal, I will not standby and wait for this issue to come to us. And so I ask all of you who serve the people of Putnam County in state government, that when you're working to negotiate this year's State Budget, please keep all of the residents of Putnam County, and that of all our local towns and villages, in mind.

Local Partnerships

Over the years, Putnam County has had to shift priorities and change plans, but the future is bright, and we have a lot of important and exciting projects ahead.

One significant example dates back to 2017, when the prior County Executive announced a municipal sewer project on Rte. 6 with the city of Danbury and its former Mayor. Unfortunately, following that announcement, the proper approvals from the Danbury city council were never

realized, and the project cost ballooned from what was initially estimated at \$12 million to over \$30 million. Part of the design for this project was to be funded by a major grant that former Congressman Sean Patrick Maloney had promised, but it fell through before I took office. Regardless, the former Congressman's grant would have only gotten us to a portion of the design phase and still would have left more than 90% of the new estimated cost unfunded. After discussing the matter in person with Danbury Mayor Roberto Alves, and after consulting with our Commissioner of Planning, Barbara Barosa, it was clear that due to several years without progress on this project, the county was in jeopardy of losing a separate Empire State Development grant from New York. Instead of returning the award, we decided we would find a way to repurpose it and make a positive difference.

We're fortunate that due to our continued dialogue with local government leaders, we identified another project that should be eligible for this state grant. And we're seeking to repurpose the award to assist with the revitalization of Front Street in the town of Patterson.

This is something that's a major priority for the community. Both Supervisor Rich Williams and his town board members have also agreed to utilize their ARPA dollars, in addition to repurposing ARPA dollars provided to the Town by the County, to further support this economic revitalization effort. The commitment to this project's success is real and clear. Front street will see new municipal water installed that brings the potential for a complete makeover. This will make it more attractive to residents, visitors, and businesses.

And on top of all this, earlier this week, I received a call from Congressman Mike Lawler to inform me that the proposed \$5.5 million for new construction and accessibility upgrades to sidewalks throughout Putnam County, was included in the House Appropriations Bill that passed yesterday. Thank you, Congressman for keeping Putnam a priority, and bringing home this critical funding.

We're always seeking to find new and creative ways to partner with and provide savings to our towns and villages, and in turn, assist in further reducing the tax burden on residents. As it stands, the County already successfully executes a number of shared services. Our personnel department serves all other local municipalities, specifically, all 6 towns, 3 villages, 6 school districts, 4 public libraries and numerous other Special District authorities. Our DPW team continues to utilize shared services with a number of local municipalities, benefiting both County, Town and Village governments, to support various projects, training, and storm-response operations. Our Bureau of Emergency Services serves our entire county in many capacities; through emergency response coordination with 8 police agencies, 7 EMS agencies, and 13 fire departments. And on top of providing dispatch services, the Bureau also provides specialized training for EMT certification, CPR, Stop the Bleed, and more. Last year, the county also took on a \$3 million contract with a new paramedic provider, continuing the county subsidized Advanced Life Support service that responds throughout Putnam.

EMS continues to adapt to many modern-day challenges, and county governments across the state are revisiting how they support this local service. Putnam County has long been one of the only, if not the only, county governments to fund county-wide ALS services. More and more counties are looking at regional models, like Putnam County's, to support their local agencies that are struggling. The truth is this is a challenge that every community is facing, and Putnam is no exception. Towns and local agencies across the county are being creative and taking on additional responsibilities to bolster their agency's response capabilities. Carmel is a great example. It's one of the reasons I fully support, without any hesitation, Carmel Volunteer Ambulance Corps' (CVVAC) application for a Certificate of Need to expand its Basic Life Support services Town-Wide in Carmel - something Supervisor Mike Cazzari and CVVAC have been working aggressively towards obtaining. And, that's why I'm also excited to share that Putnam County will be welcoming back a familiar face as its EMS Director at the end of this month. No one is more respected, knowledgeable, and trusted in EMS than Bob Cuomo from Patterson. I thank him for coming back to Putnam County—where he belongs. Thank you, Bob. In addition, earlier this year we hired a new director of emergency management; former Capitol police and Homeland Security special agent Chris Shields of Philipstown. Please join me in welcoming Chris to the team. Chris' first day happened to be during our worst snowstorm in 2 or so years and thankfully we got through it with no issues. Great job Chris, a sign of things to come.

Speaking of emergency services, last summer Putnam County dealt with multiple declared emergencies. On July 9th our region was hit by a massive torrent of rain that brought millions of dollars of damage across the county. Hardest hit was Putnam Valley and Philipstown. Our Bureau of Emergency Services, DPW crews, and County Sheriff's Office lead the effort in making sure residents were safe. The damage to the county's longest stretch of roadway, Peekskill Hollow Road, was significant and we moved swiftly to communicate with local officials and respond.

Many expected the storm damage to further complicate the bridge construction fiasco that had plagued Peekskill Hollow Road since 2021, years before I took office. Fortunately, prior to the storm, we addressed the long-standing issues regarding the delayed work and the previous contractor on Peekskill Hollow Road. Since then, this Administration has brought in a new contractor with work expected to be completed later this summer.

Part of that process was ensuring we had ample communication with Putnam Valley officials and residents. I'm quite lucky, and residents are fortunate to have such a hard working, dynamic supervisor in Jackie Annabi. Jackie, thank you for all you do.

After we secured a new contractor, and coincidentally, shortly after the storm, Legislator Bill Gouldman and I held a joint constituent forum in Putnam Valley to address residents' questions and concerns, regarding both the storm and bridge construction. We had over 100 in attendance and answered every single question that was asked of us. As last year's Chair of Physical Services, no one was a stronger advocate for the completion of this project than Bill. Thank you, my friend.

We intend to take those lessons learned from Peekskill Hollow Road and apply them to the upcoming Fair Street project in Carmel, where we will be announcing additional details of the major reconstruction shortly. This is a huge project that has been talked about for decades, and we're going to hold a constituent forum with local officials, residents, and whichever future contractor is awarded the opportunity to work on this massive undertaking. It is going to be disruptive to our everyday lives, but there is no way around this. The best we can do, and what I promise, is that we will communicate, and continue to push for a level of transparency unseen before in Putnam County Government.

Transparency

Transparency is at the heart of everything we do in this administration. It's one of the reasons why I requested the State Comptroller's assistance in conducting a Risk Assessment of our finances and operations last year. We know we're not perfect, and we remain eager to find ways we can improve. We've already taken a number of steps to be more effective communicators with residents. For example, last year, thanks to IT and DPW, we launched the county construction project portal on our website. Here you can view regular updates regarding county road projects, and each is assigned a color code, red, yellow or green, to easily indicate the project status.

We're currently working to construct our budget transparency website, which will display detailed budgetary information in a more digestible format for the layperson who may not have a degree in accounting. This particular measure, which the Legislature funded in our 2024 Budget, is also part of the administration's proposed Taxpayer Transparency Act that was re-submitted to the Legislature earlier this year, along with the Local Taxpayer Protection Act, as part of a package of proposed local laws. In that package, I also offered several amendments which included a new self-imposed mandate on the County Executive's office, requiring a public hearing to be held by the county executive, after and apart from his or her yearly budget presentation.

The reality is residents are not always available to appear in person to hear about the operations of their government. Accessibility is sometimes an obstacle for differently abled citizens, and sometimes, folks are just plain busy. That's why I'm so excited and proud to see that the Legislature has installed new camera technology in the County Office Building to air their committee meetings in audio and visual formats. I applaud the Legislature, especially the leadership of Chairman Jonke, for this action. I look forward to being able to view your committee meetings remotely.

That said, if we all agree this is a good practice and standard to set, then I continue to believe we should put this standard in statute and codify it. That way, we can rest assured that these standards will have a better chance extending beyond our terms of elected office. I hope this matter will receive additional discussion within the Legislature later this year.

But as I mentioned before, the effort to make information more accessible should not just be on the Legislature or any one branch of government. I too have an obligation as your County Executive, and that is why this administration has sought to obtain a level of accountability and accessibility that is unmatched by prior Administrations in Putnam County. We've shared more budgetary information on our county website than any previous administration. We're more active on social media, utilizing multiple verified platforms, while updating residents more than ever before. Last year, we held 6 constituent forums, one in each town. And this year, as our Legislators can see in the books before them, we've standardized our annual reports. And in doing so, we created a more professional, consolidated, digestible document that every legislator can now have on their own. **[Prop: Compare the old binder reports to show the contrast]** What's more, for the first time ever, this document is also being shared online so that every resident can better visualize and understand where their tax dollars are going.

These annual reports are incredible, showcasing all the detailed work that our dedicated county employees do every single day to make Putnam County a great place to live, work and raise a family. Whether you're one of our valued seniors, or part of a young family just starting your life here, our county employees touch the lives of every single resident in both small and big ways.

Department Highlights

Health

In 2023, it felt as if our employees finally moved beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, illustrated by the activity of our Department of Health. Last year, under Dr. Neishewat's leadership the department once again held the Food Operators Seminar, in-person, at the Putnam County Golf Course. More than 80 different food industry related organizations and businesses from across the county attended, providing them with educational and networking opportunities. No other county in the region offers anything like this.

Health also collaborated with our County Sheriff's Office, and the Prevention Council of Putnam to collect over 387 pounds of old or expired medication, and 375 pounds of used sharps. Our environmental health services employees investigated 334 rabies exposure cases. Our nursing and clinical staff provided nearly 2,000 flu immunizations and performed 316 new-mom assist visits.

DSS

Caring for our most vulnerable often falls on the good and kind people working at our Department of Mental Health, Social Services & Youth Bureau, led by our new Commissioner Sara Servadio. I cannot say enough about the work this team has done over the past year. On top of working round the clock with our partners at PeopleUSA to open a brand-new Stabilization Center in Putnam, they have worked to expand the services we provide to individuals in need.

In 2023, the Mental Health Department set up an RFP process and, with approval from the Legislature, distributed opioid settlement funds to 5 great community partners that are going to collectively expand and better the way in which addiction and recovery services are offered in Putnam. (And by the way, thank you Deputy Chairwoman Amy Sayegh for your work on that committee. I recognize that was a ton of work and to take that on meant a lot. Thank you.) In addition to all this, the department also partnered with school districts to provide Mental Health First Aid training to our youth, and established the office for individuals with disabilities, lead by Dana Touponse, further fulfilling our commitment from last year to ThinkDIFFERENTLY.

In 2023, Child Protective Services investigated 565 cases. Adult protective services investigated 109 cases. DSS processed thousands of applications for social safety net programs including SNAP, HEAP, EAF and temporary housing.

Our Mental Health leaders also launched their new co-response team with the Putnam Sheriff's Office, designed to assist with responding to emergencies by having law enforcement work hand-in-hand with mental health professionals.

Sheriff

Under our Sheriff Kevin McConville, our Putnam County Sheriff's Office has continued to rise to meet new heights and challenges. Earlier this year, it formally applied for accreditation from the New York Department of Criminal Justice Services.

Striving to set the standard for policing and overcoming adversity is not new for the Sheriff's Office. Last year, during the State of the County I referenced a tragic incident that occurred a few short months before, where officers responded to a horrific scene and had to make the split-second decision to exercise deadly force in order to save a life. Our sheriff's deputies were put in an impossible situation where they were forced to take quick and immediate action. We held off on recognizing them last year because we knew the Attorney General's office would have to complete its investigation, but I said that I had no doubt we would be recognizing them as heroes. The AG has since concluded its investigation, and I say again... to our men and women in blue who responded that day, several whom I've known for many years long before my time in elected office, I am so unbelievably proud of you. You saved a life, and you are heroes. Thank you.

Yet another reason why I am so pleased to share tonight that both Sheriff McConville and I came to an agreement with the Sheriff's PBA for a 5 -year contract, which passed the PBA membership this past month. This is a good and fair contract that will retroactively take effect for January of 2023 for our deputies, their families, and our residents. It has my full and complete support. It is my understanding that the Legislature has called for a special full meeting to follow its personnel committee meeting next week to consider this contract. I thank Chairman Jonke for calling this special meeting and encourage the ratification of this contract as soon as possible.

County Clerk

Our amazing Putnam County Clerk who also serves as the county's records management officer, Michael Bartolotti, continues to deliver top notch services throughout the county. Throughout his tenure, he's earned a remarkable reputation for his commitment to customer service. Last year, our Clerk and the DMV partnered with the Youth Bureau to announce a new program called "Parents as Driving Partners." The program does more to engage parents in teaching young people skills on how to drive safely and responsibly, and it has taken off as a regional collaboration with other counties. Interest is growing fast as we see this model being replicated by counties across the state.

District Attorney

Our District Attorney's Office, led by DA Bob Tandy received 1,356 cases, and closed out 1,116 in 2023. The office continues to render legal assistance and partners with Village and Town Police Departments, the Putnam County Sheriff's Office, the New York State Police, the Child Advocacy Center, Women's Resource Center as well as numerous other state and federal law enforcement related agencies. While many may simply think of "prosecution" when they think of a DA's office, the reality is DA Tandy and his team work collaboratively on numerous other outreach efforts to improve quality of life, keep our county safe, and provide alternatives to incarceration-one of the most notable ways is through its participation with the Putnam County Treatment Court. This, as our DA's office continues to face challenges with volumes of extra work created by changes to the state's Discovery and Bail laws.

Veterans

Putnam County's premier Veterans Service Agency, led by the legendary Karl Rohde, was extremely busy in 2023 shattering records. They assisted 385 individual Veterans with a variety of issues, many times helping them access funds that they had earned through their military service; securing over \$820k in retroactive payments, and over \$3.6 million in total compensation. Let me reiterate that; Karl Rohde and his staff managed to help Veterans in our community receive \$3.6 million dollars of benefits last year. That is a 30% increase in monetary recoveries over the prior year.

Our Veterans Service Agency also regularly assists those living in our unique one-of-a-kind Veterans Residence, which saw a new welcome sign installed thanks to the American Legion in Mahopac, and their driveway and parking lot re-paved thanks to some shared services received by our friends at the Southeast Town Highway Department. Our Veterans Services Agency worked with Guardian Revival and Dwyer Vet2Vet to bring back the Veterans Chow down, in person, for the first time in 3 years, serving over 500 meals to Veterans. None of this would have been possible without the hard-work and dedication of Karl's Deputy, Art Hanley, who has notified us that he'll be retiring in June. Please join me in giving a warm round of applause to thank Art for his military service, as well as his years of service as an instrumental part of our Putnam County team.

Probation

Next, our County probation department is innovating to help a commonly overlooked population. In 2023, led by our dedicated Director John Osterhout, the department conducted the first “Ready, Set, Work” program, who’s first cohort of graduates praised as “life changing.” This program provides for a hands-on experience that is designed to improve job prospects and long-term employability of those who have gone through the criminal justice system. By collaborating with local businesses and organizations, including local banks, a local attorney for mock job interviews, and the County Workforce Partnership, John and his team are not only offering practical skills to those on probation, but instilling confidence and a sense of purpose in these individuals.

OSR

The Office for Senior Resources continues its invaluable work of serving hundreds of residents per day, working to provide meals, connections to services, and offer residents with new opportunities for companionship and social interaction. OSR has instituted a new direct messaging system with our senior clients, allowing them to directly call, text, and email people updates to programs, closures, and relevant health information. In 2023, OSR resumed their annual health fairs with collaboration from Assemblyman Slater’s office and began a cooperative venture with Mid-Hudson ARC processing and transporting weekly produce pickups from our own Tilly Foster Farm to provide fresh, healthy, farm-to-table produce at our senior friendship centers. 2023 also saw a dramatic increase in Putnam County SeniorCorps volunteer hours, providing significant savings to the County, and signaling yet another return to normalcy. OSR also seized opportunities to bring in new people to engage and inspire our seniors. Perhaps the most notable example was during last year’s Saint Patrick’s Day luncheon where, in addition to some traditional live Irish music, a group of our seniors were surprised by a special guest speaker, Fox News Meteorologist, Seniors Advocate and Author of “I Am The Storm” Janice Dean. There is a very large team of people at OSR who care for our seniors. Thank you to everyone at OSR, especially Director Mike Cunningham and Deputy Director Marlene Barrett.

Real Property

Our Office of Real Property received new leadership last year, with Trish McLoughlin taking over the division. Trish and her staff have worked diligently to modernize the office with new software, equipment and procedures, making the department more efficient. The office outsourced many of its printing operations. It no longer has to print every single deed that comes through, it stopped printing the tax rolls, and instead has worked to make everything available electronically. Trish and her team are working closer than ever with our local assessors, getting their input on how we as a county can be more effective in the distribution of tax bills.

Planning & Transportation

In the Planning, Development & Public Transportation Department, Commissioner Barbara Barosa and her team have been working tirelessly to get Putnam designated a Climate Smart community. After initial efforts in 2019 stalled, we're now finally moving forward with a Climate Community Task Force. And, earlier this week, a plan and application was submitted to New York State applying for Bronze certification.

Putnam County, led by its Director of Transportation Vinny Tamagna, is also moving forward with a pilot program for its on-demand public transit rides. Access to public transportation continues to be a challenge in a county like ours that is dominated by suburban communities, narrow, windy local roads, and a lack of major metro areas. That's why we're exploring new ways to make our transit system more efficient, by supplanting the current PART 3 route which provides transportation from Putnam Plaza through the Town of Patterson, with an on-demand dispatch and ride system. A smartphone app will dispatch smaller handicap accessible vans to reach a greater geography, meeting people of all abilities, where they are. The fact is, too many of our buses are underutilized. We have to find more creative, accessible solutions, and this is our first step to doing just that.

Consumer Affairs

We task all our departments with spending the public's tax dollars in the most efficient and effective manner possible, and they all manage to deliver quality service. Still, very few of our departments actually generate revenue, or make money, for county government while providing a critical service. That's why I want to take a moment to thank the men and women of Consumer Affairs, and specifically Director Mike Budzinski who works part time as a department head. Mike and his team are responsible for ensuring confidence and quality services are provided by the many contractors who conduct their business within Putnam County. It's their job to make sure bad actors are held accountable. And by doing so in 2023, their office also generated over 1.1 million dollars in revenue. Thank you, Mike.

DPW

Our newly minted Department of Public Works was extremely busy in 2023. On top of ensuring smooth operations at our county parks and maintaining the county's 117 center line miles of roadway and support of over 60 miles of NYS road, DPW does a lot. They also maintain our facilities, they inspect dams, they provide technical support and educational outreach through the soil and water conservation district.. Last year, Commissioner Feighery and his team oversaw the completion of the critically important Drewville Road bridge project; they finished major improvements providing face-lifts to both the 6N DPW Garage, heavily advocated for by Legislator Erin Crowley, and the Koehler Memorial Senior Center in Mahopac; and they completed the demolition of the old Cantina Building on Tilly Foster Farm to make way for a new Cornell Cooperative Building- a project supported with grants from Senator Harckham and a former Assemblyman, that, after some minor delays, has made significant progress with the

successful completion of a lease agreement with the County and construction expected to start this year. DPW was also instrumental in clearing storm damage during last year's emergency on Peekskill Hollow Road, Wood St, as well as Upper and Lower Station Roads..

BES

As I mentioned earlier, in 2023, the Bureau of Emergency Services had its work cut out for it dealing with a number of management vacancies, but it rose to the occasion and performed admirably during the July storms among numerous other emergencies. The TOPS building received a significant makeover, with a new roof and a new front façade that includes a handicap accessible ramp. The Bureau held several emergency and EOC activation drills for county personnel with the state's Department of Homeland Security & Emergency Services. The Bureau also launched a brand-new Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system for our 911 center. Not to be outdone by another major project when we had the opportunity to announce plans over the summer for the construction of a brand new fire training center. This facility will play a pivotal role in providing our brave firefighters and other emergency first responders with the resources they need to train and protect our communities effectively. This capital project required the confidence and support of the Legislature, and I'm pleased to say they didn't blink and seized the opportunity to secure the funds required with strong bipartisan support. This project, is also supported with funds secured by U.S. Senator Gillibrand and state Senator Harckham. It remains on schedule. We expect to see it completed towards the end of this summer.

Law/Migrant Crisis

This past year, many departments were tested. Thankfully, our own Law Department led by none other than Compton Spain, ensured the County's interests was protected when faced with numerous legal obstacles. The Law Department was instrumental during negotiations with the previous contractor for Peekskill Hollow Road, and later secured a landmark decision regarding New York City's migrant relocation program and associated litigation. When the migrant crisis exploded in 2023, I declared a county emergency to acknowledge and prevent action by NYC or any other municipality that would seek to foist its responsibilities, without any plan or coordination, onto Putnam County residents. We know that the City's migrant placement provider, whose reputation has since been marred by scandal and controversy, contacted at least one facility in Putnam County to inquire about dropping off homeless individuals in our county.

The overwhelming majority of this Legislature and I felt it important to act, and we passed a local law preventing any municipality (not just New York City) from offloading its homeless population, including migrants, in Putnam without a shared services agreement. Some expressed their concerns, others spread false information and hatred about our actions, some even alleged that the county would be undermining local zoning and have to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars in court defending our action, and that the New York Civil Liberties Union

would sue us. The reality is, it's now fairly obvious these alarmists were wrong. Their predictions were never realized. And that is because their predictions were in fact grounded by falsehoods spread by fearmongers and members of bias press that sought to exploit a humanitarian crisis for clicks — although, to be clear, more than 40 municipalities across the state issued executive orders related to the migrant crisis, and New York City and its Mayor Eric Adams, filed suit against over 30 of them, including Putnam County, and myself, to force us to rescind our emergency actions; clearly validating our concerns, and proving our decision to act was warranted.

In the end, the steps we took, the declaration of emergency, and the local law, were distinctively different from that of our neighbors. Our actions were well thought out, reasoned, and in the best interest of Putnam County given the situation we had faced, and the litigation from NYC against Putnam County was dismissed in its entirety by a New York State Supreme Court Judge in New York City, with minimal expense to Putnam County. We faced a new and unprecedented challenge that County government was simply not designed to address, but we acted and helped prevent a homelessness crisis from unfolding in our communities. Since then, Putnam County's local law has become a model policy for other county and local governments to consider when facing similar challenges.

DGS

As I expressed earlier, this Administration is always seeking new and creative ways to realize savings, prioritize spending, enhance efficiencies, and cut costs for taxpayers. That's why I am pleased that the Legislature, in this year's County Budget, approved a move to enhance efficiency and realize savings through the centralization of expenditures under our Purchasing, Central Services & Information Technology Departments. Thanks to your efforts in centralizing budget lines for computers, fuel, utilities, copiers and vehicle leases to name a few, we have already saved over \$126,000. Many of these lines and purchases had traditionally been somewhat segmented department to department. By centralizing the administration of these services we've managed to get a clearer picture of the County's full spending on these items enabling us to better leverage our purchasing power in the free market and get substantially better deals and rates. But that wasn't my only intention with this move.

In order to most effectively realize the influence that Purchasing, Central Services and IT have on county operations, I believe that we should unite these departments into one **Department of General Services**—and I can think of no one better to lead this new department as its Commissioner than our current Director of Purchasing & Central Services- a former Deputy County Executive, - John Tully.

IT, Purchasing, and Central Services touch every department and operation in county government. By combining the talents that exist within these departments into one, we will be able to better run county government, and create more opportunities for savings and efficiencies across the board.

This is not a new idea or revolutionary concept in county government, it's just new for Putnam County. Looking at our surrounding counties, as well as the state, they each have an office of general services. Like other counties that are realizing greater savings, our proposal would ultimately centralize these services while fixing major deficiencies in our County Charter. I mentioned this last year during our Budget Presentation. While I can't say when this happened for sure, as far as we can tell it was some ten plus years ago, that the Information & Technology Department was mysteriously erased from the Charter and was never rectified by a charter review. With the creation of the Department of General Services, we would be formally recognizing IT/GIS back in our County Charter as an independent division, leveraging its full strength while maintaining all its highly skilled workforce.

John Tully and Tom Lannon have jointly penned a proposal that they hope to present to the Legislature for its consideration. Our executive staff will be following up on the matter first thing tomorrow morning. We already did the financial changes within the budget- this proposal does not cost us a dime more. It is my sincere hope that we can move quickly, respond to questions, and get this done, together.

Executive Charter Review Committee

While reviewing many facets of the County Charter and Code, my office and the Law Department also discovered a number of inefficiencies, contradictions, and omissions. That's why today, I am also announcing my intention to commission an executive review committee of the county charter and code. Representatives from our Administration and the community will meet on a regular basis to work, solely in an advisory capacity, on updating our policies and procedures, assisting us, and offering advice on how best to revise the charter. To be very clear, this committee does not supplant or replace the Charter Review Commission, and again, will be purely advisory. Earlier this week I notified the Legislature of the individuals who have agreed to participate on this committee, which among them includes former Deputy County Executive and Carmel Town Supervisor Frank DelCampo, current Mayor of Nelsonville Christine Winward, and former Executive Director of Cornell Cooperative Extension Margery Keith.

Employee Recognition Program

During my last State of the County, we announced that we would be reviving the Employee Recognition Program. It took a little while to get going but last year, we were able to announce that Kim Roberts of the Health Department was our Employee of the Year for 2022. Kim is an amazing public servant with an infectious personality and energy about her that shines through in everything she does. And I love reading her daily emails about how I can better my own health as a proud Putnam County employee.

Kim was chosen by a selection committee of her peers consisting of 5 union agreement covered employees. The nominations submitted to the committee are redacted heavily to make sure that no one knows who nominated the individuals, what the nominees' names are, and what department they work in. This is to ensure that the individuals are judged purely on their

merits. This is the process we are and will follow every year for the Employee Recognition Program. Following that disclaimer... Tonight, I'm proud to announce the honoree for 2023; Linda Ammicucci of the Department of Social Services.

Linda is a wonderful, kind, public servant who works every day to help some of our most vulnerable residents, working in foster care and adoption

In the words of the individual who nominated her, "She gives of her time and energy freely to get children to a safe environment."

"If someone in need calls, she tries to address it anyway that she can, often going above and beyond what is part of her actual job duty."

"At her adoptions, everyone is accepted and will feel the love. She keeps in touch with the children she has worked with, and is always there for them, even writing College Reference letters and exploring local scholarships with the kids she's helped."

We will be adding Linda's name to the plaque that is proudly displayed in the County Office Building, and later this year, we will honor her at a brief ceremony.

It is because of County employees like Linda, that we live in a county that's such a beautiful place to call home..

Please join me again in giving a warm congratulations and round of applause to Linda.

SIPP

Our county workforce has tremendous knowledge and experience. They possess a wealth of ideas, and we want to tap into their institutional knowledge to make county government work better and realize greater savings. That's why during last year's budget presentation, this administration proposed the Savings Incentive Partnership Program (SIPP). If a county employee has an idea on how to save the county money, and that idea in its execution realizes actual cost-savings, SIPP would provide them an opportunity to get a share of that savings. This program, sometimes referred to in business as "gainsharing" seeks to encourage our employees to think outside the box about how we spend and can save taxpayer money. While the Legislature did approve a budget line for this program for its tracking and implementation, it can only be used after savings are realized, which means the financing for this program comes from its own success. As drafted, the review process for proposals will include participation from both the Administration and the Legislature. Earlier this year I re-submitted a proposed local law for this program for the Legislature's review and consideration. I hope we get to discuss this further so it can be implemented this year.

Conclusion

When I was running to be County Executive, and since taking office, we have been pushing everyone to think differently, not just about those with different abilities, but about everything

we do. I love this community, I love this county, and I love going to work every day with the 650+ some odd employees who are committed to doing work worthy of the residents we serve.

Putnam County is open for business and play. We have record low unemployment rates, we're consistently one of the healthiest, safest counties in NYS, and we're working to create more economic opportunities for all. No idea is too small or too grand. When I took office, I made it clear using the justification "well, that's how we've always done it" would not be an acceptable answer. I was elected to change the status quo and to strengthen this county with a more affordable, accountable, and accessible government that serves us all.

Putnam County is a place where anyone, regardless of their background, can pursue and achieve success. Every single day of this administration, I work to empower individuals to succeed. We are a county of entrepreneurs, innovators, and hardworking people who are dedicated to building a better future for ourselves and our families.

I am deeply honored and proud to work with every single one of you, and I look forward to the future, and what we can achieve, together.

Thank you.