

Baskin Wins Unanimous Support for Prisoner Reintegration Efforts

Resolution calls for the Erie County Department of Social Services to accept applications for future assistance from prisoners

A resolution sponsored by Erie County Legislature Majority Leader April N. M. Baskin calling upon the Erie County Department of Social Services to accept applications for future assistance from incarcerated individuals was passed unanimously at today's session.

Majority Leader Baskin is committed to supporting, empowering, and fully integrating into our community those persons who were formerly incarcerated. Former prisoners who are indigent have an immediate need for access to housing, transportation and food. Individuals who are not able to meet these needs upon release encounter problems with transitioning back to society.

New York State law requires counties to provide emergency housing for individuals who do not have housing. Although incarcerated individuals cannot receive public assistance, the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance allows local Departments of Social Services to accept applications from incarcerated individuals so that public assistance supports are in place upon release from custody. However, Erie County's Department of Social Services does not currently accept applications for future assistance from incarcerated individuals.

"Under the current system, individuals released from incarceration must apply and then wait for up to 45 days to receive financial assistance," noted Baskin. "And because they are initially directed into emergency housing, taxpayers wind up paying more. If we are serious about preventing recidivism and its negative impact on our community, we should enable prisoners to be proactive about obtain housing and other support services prior to being released from incarceration."

Because the County is obligated to provide emergency housing to homeless individuals, many individuals released from incarceration who apply to the Erie County Department of Social Services would be eligible for emergency housing, but at a greater cost to the County than the shelter allowance available in a public assistance grant.

Both the New York State Assembly and Senate are currently considering legislation to amend the Social Services Law to direct county Social Services Districts to accept applications for Safety Net Assistance from incarcerated individuals beginning forty-five days before their release dates and in such a way that the interim period between application and release shall count toward the forty-five day waiting period for Safety Net Assistance.

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