

## Dutchess County Legislature, February 10, 2025 Board Meeting

The meeting began with the presentation of a proclamation by Legislator Atkins regarding Black History Month, which was established by the Legislature by proclamation in 1976 to honor the contributions of African-Americans to our nation's history, but had not been updated since 1978. The 2025 proclamation traced the history of the Black History Month, and specifically acknowledged the contributions of abolitionist Frederick Douglass who delivered a powerful speech in Poughkeepsie "rallying thousands to the cause of justice and to end slavery," and Jane Matilda Bolin, a Poughkeepsie native who became the first African-American female judge in the United States. Powerfully, after noting that the Black experience is not monolithic and encompasses a diverse range of identities "each contributing uniquely to the rich tapestry of our society," the proclamation ended with the following: "Be it further resolved that Dutchess County Legislature affirms that Black history is not a separate entity but a fundamental part of American history deserving recognition, celebration and integration into our collective consciousness."

Before turning to other business, Chairman Truitt announced the retirement of Chris Balano, Assistant County Executive, and thanked him for decades of service to the County.

After approval of the minutes, Legislator Kaul reported that the Environmental Management Council is hoping to update its enabling legislation, will be presenting a State of the Environment report, and continues to offer services to the Legislature on matters relating to the environment. She also reported that the Climate Smart Task Force is considering various climate action plans and commended a report by the Task Force in the County Executive's Report 2025.

Eight Resolutions on the consent agenda were adopted unanimously without discussion: #16 (authorizing funding under the Trade Adjustment Act); # 17 (amending the county budget as it pertains to the Office for the Aging); # 18 (appoint to the county Board of Health); # 19 (amending the county budget as it pertains to Departments of Planning and Family Services and Mental Health); # 20 (confirming new appointment to the county Planning Board); #23 ( amending 2024 resolution 187 to include required NYS language relating to implementation and funding of a Department of Public Works transportation project); #25 (amending the county budget as it pertains to the Distric Attorney); and #26 (confirming appointment to the county Veterans Affairs Committee). Voting on one additional resolution, # 22 -- which concerned persons required to file an annual financial disclosure statement pursuant to the county Board of Ethics-- was postponed until the April 14 Board Meeting, in order to further clarify the boards and agencies that must file.

Legislator Munn announced that there are vacancies on the Board of the Resource and Recovery Agency and urged fellow legislators and the public to spread the word to identify individuals interested in serving.

Homelessness and Mental Health issues were key concerns of the meeting. Several legislators (Atkins, Kaul, Drago) raised questions, made comments, and sought updates about the shelter at 26 Oakley Street in particular and the issue of homelessness in general. They sought clarification as to the requirements for accessing the shelter, the numbers of people accessing

“the pods”, whether or why people are being turned away, and the failure of outreach to the community by the shelter director. There was also a challenge to comments by County Executive Serino seemingly downplaying the seriousness of the homelessness problem (by comparing numbers in Orange and Ulster counties) and without focusing on real solutions. Legislator Drago implored: “We need a coordinated approach, one that brings together local officials, service providers and community members to ensure that resources are deployed effectively and that long term solutions, including expanded access to permitted housing are strengthened and strengthened mental health and addiction services are prioritized. ... [H]omelessness is not a public relations issue. It’s a human crisis. Fewer people in the shelter doesn’t mean few people in need.”

Legislator Lawler sought clarification from the Legislator’s counsel regarding a 2024 Resolution (#132) relating to the shelter that, apparently, is still “pending” and has not been put into effect. Counsel agreed to look into the matter and report back.

Legislator Brendili requested that the Commissioner come to a future meeting in the Spring to discuss the youth mental health crisis respite, and an update on what is being done with another pool grant of \$10 million that was received.

Two members of the public spoke. The first, the Vice Chair of the Mental Hygiene Board for Dutchess County and the mother of two daughters with mental illness (one with juvenile bipolar disorder), pointed to the lack of mental health resources for youth in the county, specifically the lack of any certified pediatric psychiatrists. She urged the legislators and the public to put pressure on the two hospital systems in the area to commit to providing mental health services to the community and to recruit board certified pediatric psychiatrist to this area.

The second, City of Poughkeepsie resident Laurie Sandow, spoke of the continued absence of warming shelters and/or published lists or posts regarding such shelters. She also renewed her call for a countywide 311 system, and, with respect to homeless shelters, offered her understanding that some serious and persistently mentally ill people (including veterans) are being turned away from shelters because they do not meet the criteria or are incapable of understanding what is required of them.

Finally, condolences were offered to the memory of Sylvia Culhane and John Patrick White who served Dutchess County, and to Blair Caswell, father of county legislator Steve Caswell.