

Robert P. Astorino  
County Executive

August 10, 2010

Westchester County Board Legislators  
800 Michaelian Office Building  
White Plains, New York 10601

Dear Members of the County Board of Legislators:

I respectfully request that your Honorable Board adopt the attached Local Law which would, if adopted, amend the Laws of Westchester County to abolish the Department of Emergency Services as a separate department and transfer its functions, powers and duties to the Department of Public Safety.

The Westchester County Department of Public Safety (hereinafter "DPS") was created in July 1979 through a merger of the Westchester County Parkway Police and the Westchester County Sheriff's Department. As initially organized, DPS included an Office of Disaster and Emergency Services (hereinafter "ODES"). This Office was responsible for disaster preparedness as well as for coordinating the County's response to requests for emergency disaster assistance from local municipalities.

In 1997, the County established the Department of Fire Safety Services, which was replaced two years later by the Westchester County Department of Emergency Services (hereinafter "DES"). Upon creation of DES, the functions of ODES were transferred from DPS to DES and redesignated as the Office of Emergency Management.

A recent report by DPS and DES found that a consolidation of DPS and DES into a single department would offer substantial financial and operational benefits to the County and its taxpayers. By combining the two departments, Westchester County would achieve immediate and significant cost savings. In the first year following consolidation, savings are estimated at \$730,000, through the elimination of a commissioner and other administrative positions. The savings resulting from consolidated operations would grow with each passing year – to more than \$1.7 million annually by the end of the third year following consolidation. These cost savings would be as a result of attrition in the combined work force, elimination of duplicative personnel and tasks, and other efficiencies.

Office of the County Executive

Michaelian Office Building  
White Plains, New York 10601

Telephone: (914) 995-2900

E-mail: ceo@westchestergov.com



Significantly, a single department offers the opportunity to more efficiently deliver police and emergency services to Westchester residents and that consolidation would:

- eliminate duplicative services;
- centralize communications;
- combine the DPS Hazardous Devices Unit (Bomb Squad) and DES Hazardous Materials Response Team;
- unify command and control at major incidents and emergencies;
- reduce administrative costs;
- merge budget, human resources and some training functions;
- improve grant administration, including a more efficient allocation of the counter-terrorism funding that now comes to DPS and DES separately; and
- provide better emergency response to local communities.

Indeed, public safety in Westchester County will benefit from greater command and control of operational services and improved resource management together with a unified chain of command which will aid in the decision making process and facilitate the flow of information to all involved in emergency operations.

Furthermore, the consolidation of the functions of law enforcement and disaster response into a single entity would: (1) facilitate more cohesive planning across the various disciplines required to properly prepare for and respond to disasters – whether natural or man-made – and (2) facilitate a more efficient response and allocation of resources in connection with disasters. Disaster planning and on-scene incident command require all aspects of public safety (police, fire and EMS) to sit at the same table, speak with a united voice and operate under a unified command. This proposed Local Law moves Westchester County significantly toward that goal.

Additionally, consolidating Westchester County police and emergency services under a unified administration has the potential to bring cost savings and operating efficiency to these essential services of Westchester County government. Such consolidation of police and emergency services administration in order to streamline operations has been successful locally in the City of White Plains, which manages police and fire operations under a single Department of Public Safety.

Accordingly, this proposed Local Law would abolish DES and would transfer its functions, powers and duties to DPS. Notably, the Westchester County Fire Advisory Board and the Westchester County Emergency Medical Services Advisory Board would remain viable entities in service to Westchester County, but the total maximum membership in each of such boards would be reduced from twenty-one (21) members to a more manageable fifteen (15) members. The proposed Local Law would take effect January 1, 2011.

Finally, the Department of Planning, after review of the applicable regulations under the State Environmental Quality Review Act ("SEQRA"), has advised that the proposed local law, which consolidates related programs and services under one department, may be classified as a Type II action, pursuant to Section 617.5(c)(20), "routine or continuing agency administration and management, not including new programs or major reordering of priorities that may affect the environment," and Section 617.5(c)(27), "adoption of regulations, policies, procedures and local legislative decisions in connection with any action on this list." As such, no further environmental review is required.

Accordingly, I respectfully urge the adoption of the attached proposed Local Law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert P. Astorino". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R'.

Robert P. Astorino  
County Executive

Enclosure