PERSONNEL COMMITTEE
HELD IN ROOM #318
PUTNAM COUNTY OFFICE BUILDING
CARMEL, NEW YORK 10512

Members: Chairwoman Addonizio and Legislators Russo & Sayegh

Wednesday 6:00pm August 12, 2026

The meeting was called to order at 6:04pm by Chairwoman Addonizio, who requested Legislator Russo lead in the Pledge of Allegiance. Upon roll call, Legislator Sayegh and Chairwoman Addonizio were present. Legislator Russo was absent.

Item #3 – Discussion – Retiree Health Insurance Costs

Chairwoman Addonizio stated this topic was discussed at the July Personnel Meeting and she would like to see a fair proposal move forward that demonstrates that Putnam County values its workforce. She stated some employees are hesitant or retire because of health insurance costs. She stated reducing retiree insurance contributions would reward longevity, assist with retention and recruitment.

Aileen Napolitano, a retiree of Putnam County, stated she began working for the Department of Social Services when she was 21 and worked for the County for 33 years. She stated she retired at 55 but is not yet Medicare eligible and is paying approximately three times what she paid for health insurance while employed. She requested that the Legislature consider reducing contributions for retirees during the period between retirement and Medicare eligibility.

John Mulreany, a retiree of Putnam County, stated the County may realize savings when a long-term employee retires and a new employee is hired at a lower salary and different contribution rate. He requested that years of service be taken into consideration and stated retirees understand they must contribute toward coverage but are seeking a fair reduction.

Legislator Sayegh stated she would like to see an analysis of possible options, including the fiscal impact and benefit of providing relief during the gap between retirement and Medicare eligibility. She stated any proposal must also consider the impact on taxpayers. She stated her support for addressing this concern.

Legislator Birmingham thanked the retirees for their input and stated employees may pay a lower percentage toward health insurance while working, then face a substantially higher percentage after retirement despite having lower income. He stated he would like the Legislature to act before the 2027 budget deliberations. He suggested, as a starting point for analysis, that a retiree's required contribution percentage not exceed the percentage of premium the retiree last paid as an active employee. He stated the employees should not be penalized for staying with the County for many years. He stated the County has an assigned fund balance for retiree health insurance and referenced approximately $6 million shown in the County's audited figures as of December 31, 2024. He stated the amount has remained assigned for several years and could be considered when evaluating possible relief. He requested that Acting Personnel Officer Adriene Iasoni and Acting Commissioner of Finance Alexandra Gordon estimate what that approach would cost for the 2027 budget year and for current retirees.

Acting Personnel Officer Adriene Iasoni stated there are important distinctions between retirees under age 65 and Medicare-eligible retirees, including different plans and Medicare reimbursements. She stated she could work with the Acting Commissioner of Finance Gordon on an analysis once the Legislature clarifies the scenarios to be reviewed.

Legislator Birmingham clarified that he was requesting an estimate for all current retirees receiving County health insurance, comparing their current contribution with the lowest percentage they paid during their employment. He acknowledged that historical data would provide a basis for discussion.

Legislator Crowley stated the existing retiree health insurance structure was designed in part to protect retirees with lower pension income, and she believes that protection should remain. She proposed studying a hybrid approach that considers both pension income and years of County service, including possible reductions after 20 or 25 years of service and possible elimination of contributions after 30 years. She requested that the study specifically evaluate retirees who are not yet Medicare eligible, compare neighboring counties, determine short and long-term fiscal impacts, and ensure that existing retirees are not negatively affected.

Chairwoman Addonizio reviewed information previously submitted regarding surrounding counties and stated contribution rates in Dutchess, Westchester and Orange Counties vary based on years of service. She stated many Putnam County retirees have more than 25 years of service and that years of service should be part of the review.

Acting Commissioner of Finance Alexandra Gordon stated Westchester County is being used as a comparison as they have a 0% contribution, however they do not offer the same insurance plan. She stated Putnam County offers NYSHIP coverage, which is costly but provides significant benefits; Westchester County does not offer NYSHIP. She also noted differences among retirement tiers, including ongoing New York State Retirement System contributions for Tier 6 employees, and stated future premium increases are not within the County's control. She added that many private-sector taxpayers do not have access to retiree health insurance and that those considerations should also be included in the analysis.

Legislator Birmingham stated he would like to focus on factors within the County's control and reiterated that the requested analysis is intended to establish a clear starting point.

Legislative Counsel Heather Abissi stated any resolution affecting retiree health insurance should be reviewed in light of applicable case law, specifically a case from 2022 and should clearly identify the source, terms and conditions of any benefit and the circumstances under which it may be changed. She stated the existing County language should be reviewed to ensure that any amendment will withstand legal scrutiny.

Legislator Crowley stated access to providers should also be considered because Putnam County has limited specialty services and retirees may need to travel to neighboring counties or other areas for treatment. She stated changes in provider participation can create additional transportation and costs for retirees.

Dorothy "Dot" Trottier, a retiree of Putnam County, clarified that she worked 31 years as a full-time County employee and returned for an additional 10 years after retirement. She stated when she retired in 2006 she was not paying anything for her health insurance, but her contribution subsequently increased and is now more than $4,000 per year. She requested information on the number of retirees currently receiving health insurance and emphasized that retirees' contributions have increased over time.

Acting Personnel Officer Iasoni stated that, as of July 2026, there were 341 retirees enrolled in County health insurance, of whom 290 were Medicare eligible and 51 were not Medicare eligible.

Ms. Trottier stated Medicare-eligible retirees cost the County substantially less than active employees under a family plan and emphasized that retirees are already paying a share of their coverage. She stated retirees rely more heavily on health insurance as they age and asked that the Legislature recognize the increasing contribution burden on fixed retirement income. She questioned why the retirees are now being targeted.

Legislator Regan clarified that the purpose of the discussion was not to increase retiree costs, but rather to respond to retirees who requested relief. He stated County employees may have accepted lower salaries in exchange for benefits and retirement expectations and that the Legislature should carefully review whether those expectations are being met for the current generation of retirees.

Chairwoman Addonizio reiterated that the Committee is considering ways to reduce retiree contributions, not increase them.

Rebecca Wittenberg, a retiree of Putnam County, stated many long-term employees were told during their careers that the amount they paid for health insurance near retirement would continue after they retired. She stated contribution language changed after some employees had already planned their retirement and resulted in significant increases, in some cases 500%. She stated she served on the Health Insurance Committee for the County and a detailed analysis of retiree contributions had been prepared by the County approximately 10 years ago and suggested Personnel locate that report because it may assist with the current study. She also discussed the Empire Plan's individual and family enrollment structure and suggested that an employee-plus-one option could potentially reduce costs for two-person households if such an option were available.

Acting Commissioner Gordon clarified that her reference to the Empire Plan as a high-value plan was based on the level of coverage available when medical care is needed. She referenced her own experience in needing a specific formula for her daughter who suffered from an allergy and was completely covered by insurance. She stated otherwise that it would have been a substantial cost.

Principal Personnel Specialist Patricia Rau stated she too is in a two-person household and is enrolled in the family plan under NYSHIP. She stated she has looked into the enrollment tiers offered by the Empire Plan and explained that the State has advised that adding additional tiers can affect premium pricing across the plan. She stated other plans may offer employee-plus-one coverage but may still have higher family premiums and actually wind up costing more in the long term.

Chairwoman Addonizio stated that in 2008 employees with 16 or more years of service paid a 10% contribution and noted that retiree contribution requirements later increased.

Legislator Birmingham thanked the retirees for attending and reiterated that the Legislature is examining ways to reduce the amount retirees pay.

Mr. Mulreany thanked the Legislature for continuing to address the issue and expressed hope that the discussion would result in a resolution.

Legislator Regan stated retirees who entered County service under prior expectations deserve a careful review of the benefit they were promised, while future employees can be given clearer information regarding the terms of retiree coverage.

Chairwoman Addonizio thanked everyone for attending and requested that Acting Personnel Office Iasoni and Acting Commissioner of Finance Gordon work on the requested analysis for consideration at a future meeting.

Item #4 – Approval – Amendment to the County Service Animal Policy

Principal Personnel Specialist Rau stated the proposed amendment is a minor change to the existing County Service Animal Policy that would permit a certified therapy or comfort dog to be used at the Child Advocacy Center (CAC). She stated the purpose is to support children and families who are dealing with stressful and traumatic circumstances at the CAC.

Chairwoman Addonizio stated she supports the amendment and noted that a therapy dog provides emotional support but is legally distinct from a service animal under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Child Advocacy Center Program Director Marla Behler stated the presence of a trained therapy dog can be calming and supportive for a child in crisis, particularly when the child is being asked to discuss traumatic experiences.

Legislator Sayegh stated her support for the proposal and believes a therapy dog is particularly appropriate for the CAC because of the difficult circumstances faced by children and families using the facility.

Legislative Counsel Abissi questioned how the CAC would address animal allergies and whether a separate space would be designated for therapy dog use to eliminate dander in an area that may be used by those with allergies.

CAC Program Director Behler stated families would be screened in advance, the dog would only be brought on site with the family's agreement and after confirming there were no allergy concerns. She stated the dog and handler would otherwise remain in a separate location. She stated the CAC could designate separate space to reduce exposure.

Legislator Regan questioned whether the policy provides for the discretion of CAC employees to prevent unqualified animals from being brought into the CAC.

CAC Program Director Behler stated therapy animals and handlers are specially trained and certified and must be recertified periodically.

Principal Personnel Specialist Rau stated the existing County policy excludes ordinary emotional-support animals and that the proposed exception is limited to certified therapy dogs used for the CAC program.

Legislative Counsel Abissi explained that qualifying service animals required because of a disability are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act, while an animal that merely provides emotional comfort without meeting the legal definition of a service animal is treated differently. She stated the CAC proposal involves a specific qualified therapy-animal program rather than a general right to bring emotional-support animals into County buildings.

Legislator Montgomery stated she strongly supports therapy dogs at the CAC and stated she would like to broaden the County policy to allow certified therapy animals in other County facilities.

Principal Personnel Specialist Rau stated the existing policy already permits qualifying psychiatric service animals under the ADA, but expanding a general therapy-animal exception Countywide could create management, insurance and operational concerns across different County facilities.

Legislative Counsel Abissi stated a broader expansion may be possible but would require additional review with the County's insurer and Risk Management because different facilities present different allergy, space and liability concerns. She recommended beginning with the narrow CAC proposal, evaluating how it works, and considering broader changes separately if appropriate.

Legislator Crowley questioned how the County could fully prevent exposure to animal dander when people may carry pet hair into County buildings.

Legislative Counsel Abissi stated not every circumstance can be eliminated, but the County must reasonably anticipate known risks and demonstrate due diligence when adopting a policy that affirmatively allows animals in a facility.

Principal Personnel Specialist Rau stated the proposed amendment had been reviewed with County Risk Management and that related insurance documentation had been provided for the CAC program.

Legislative Counsel Abissi stated language should be added to the resolution clarifying that the therapy dog would be used in space designated by the Child Advocacy Center in order to address allergy and risk-management concerns.

Principal Personnel Specialist Rau stated that could be an internal policy within the CAC.

Legislative Counsel Abissi stated it would be beneficial to have that language in the resolution as well.

Legislator Sayegh made a motion to amend the proposed resolution to provide that the therapy dog would be used in a designated space at the Child Advocacy Center; Seconded by Chairwoman Addonizio. All in favor.

Chairwoman Addonizio made a motion to pre-file the necessary resolution; Seconded by Legislator Sayegh. All in favor.

Item #5 – FYI – Accident Report – Duly Noted

Item #6 – FYI – Incident Report – Duly Noted

Item #7 – Other Business – None

Item #8 – Adjournment

There being no further business at 7:18pm, Chairwoman Addonizio made a motion to adjourn; Seconded. All in favor.

Respectfully Submitted by Deputy Clerk, Beth Robinson.