



MADISON COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

JOHN M. BECKER

Chairman

MARK SCIMONE

County Administrator

CINDY URTZ

Clerk

138 N. Court St., PO Box 635

Wampsville, NY 13163

Phone: 315/366-2201

Fax: 315/366-2502

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Contact: Samantha Field 315.366.2822

Samantha.field@madisoncounty.ny.gov

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Madison County Asks State to Not Cut Funding

Wampsville, NY – Madison County may have closed their offices to the public and made it possible for a large part of their workforce to work from home; however, they have not stopped working for the residents of Madison County. Governor Andrew Cuomo is proposing a cut of almost 50% in funding to the counties. If approved, Madison County would lose almost \$11 million. Many of the programs that have been ongoing throughout the pandemic response will not be able to continue under the Governor's proposal.

Madison County has been working hard to ensure the health and safety of our residents. Not only those on the front lines like the Department of Health, Office of Emergency Management, or Sheriff's Office; but, also those in the Department of Social Services, Solid Waste, Maintenance and Facilities, Board of Supervisors, Mental Health, Purchasing, Finance, County Attorney, Planning and Workforce Development, IT and others. Even during non-emergency times, the multiple departments of Madison County work together to provide the best services we can to our residents. That has not changed.

"Governments from the federal level, to state, to county, to town are facing funding issues, but that does not mean this is the time to cut funding to the local county governments," said Madison County Chairman John M. Becker. "If funding from the state is cut, we will have to transfer that added burden over to our tax payers. Many of them are suffering right now because of losing a job, or their business has not been able to open for months. This is not the time to raise taxes."

"Madison County employees have been working hard over the past few months to make sure our residents are not left behind," said County Administrator Mark Scimone. "Drastic cuts in funding will cause us to rethink programs and services. This is the time our residents need us the most; it is not the time to cut services and programs."

During the State of Emergency here in Madison County, the Office of Emergency Management activated the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). This is the first time in the history of the department that the EOC has been active for an extended duration event. The Emergency Management staff have been in charge of incident command operations, procurement and distribution of PPE and other emergency supplies, keeping track of everyday response efforts, as well as working on a recovery task force plan. Our 911 Communicators are part of this department as well. They have been working to answer the calls of our residents and are on the frontlines to make sure our EMS, fire and police are safe during this time and are prepared when they respond to a call.

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The Madison County Health Department is in charge of the health response for the county. Every day they are in touch with our hospitals, health care providers, schools, and other county departments making sure the health of our residents is top priority. Health department nurses, including a few nurses who came out of retirement, and volunteers from the Medical Reserve Corps perform contact investigations, in home visits, and monitor symptoms of people who are tested for COVID-19. They are on the front lines making sure that patient knows how to properly isolate themselves, educate their family members on safety, and are a reassuring voice and face during what may be one of the toughest moments in this person's life.

Additionally, Health Department staff are busy keeping track of the data on COVID-19 cases -- including who, what their life is like, where they work, symptoms, and much more -- so that we can make sure to understand this virus better in order to respond more effectively. Staff are also in touch with essential businesses to make sure they are practicing the proper protocols and have the most up to date guidance.

The Madison County Administrator and his staff have been busy making sure the Board of Supervisors is informed with the latest information, able to make decisions that are important for the residents, making sure Madison County is not kept out of regional conversations, and are the center of communication dissemination. His office is in charge of making sure residents receive the latest information about the virus, the county's response and any other information they may need via social media, newspapers, television news, distribution of flyers, or through their village and town governments.

Mental Health has continued to operate their clinic remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have also expanded their 24/7 crisis line to have more providers available to answer calls for anyone who needs assistance in Madison County during this time. Therapists have taken over 170 crisis calls from mid-March through today. Residents are faced with many new obstacles as well as anxiety. Our Mental Health staff want to make sure people can get assistance if and when they need it. Additionally, they have offered support to other county staff who are on the front lines as burnout happens, and we need to take care of each other.

The Mental Health department receives state aid from the Office of Mental Health, the Office of Addiction Services and Support, and the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities. The county contracts with agencies to develop programs with this state aid. The programs include residential programs, clinics, jail services, family support services, and substance abuse services. These programs impact county residents who may be seriously mentally ill, have chronic substance abuse issues, or have developmental needs.

Even with the added unknown of what they are responding to, the Madison County Sheriff's office, both road patrol and corrections divisions, have continued to provide protection to the residents of Madison County. Day in and day out they respond, despite not knowing whether a person they come in contact with may be infected with COVID-19.

The Planning Department works with the data provided by the MCDOH to create maps that our residents can use to see where cases of COVID-19 are impacting us the most. These maps are also used internally to track the movement of the virus. Additionally, County Workforce Development staff have been learning about and testing a training application that will allow County residents to upgrade their skills online, while out of work, to be better prepared to reenter the workforce as we begin recovery.

While the Department of Social Services is not allowing walk-ins, they are still working hard for the public. More people are in need of assistance than ever before. The DSS staff are working daily to make sure those who are on assistance receive that assistance, and those who need it for the first time ever are able to get it. They continue to work with families and youth in the community as well, making sure children and adults that need protection are not forgotten, foster children have their needs met, and that homeless have a place to be out of the weather.

Finance, Treasurer and Payroll are making sure taxes are collected, bills are paid and, most importantly, ensuring our employees are paid.

Solid Waste has been running operations on an adjusted staffing schedule. It is imperative for the health of our residents and our environment that garbage pick-up and our recycling program are not neglected.

Our Facilities and Maintenance staff will be working to install touchless paper towel dispensers, touchless soap dispensers, Plexiglas partitions in areas used by the public and other upgrades to ensure the safety of both employees and those who come to the County buildings. They also have been working very hard to make sure everything is cleaned every day from the door handles, floors, office spaces, and the railings in the stairwells. Their efforts are helping us stop the spread and protect our employees.

The County Clerk's Office has continued to process real-estate and DMV transactions for our residents.

Finally, we cannot forget the IT department. They have worked tirelessly to ensure that employees are able to work from home. They set every department up with virtual conferencing capabilities, ability to log in to the necessary programs they need from home, and made sure each employee had access to a computer of some sort. Within hours, IT setup a JIC (Joint Information Center) in a conference room. Day in and day out, they are on call for any glitch, and are even working with the towns and villages to make sure they are online as well.

We are trying to govern and lead in unprecedented times. At Madison County, our priority is to make sure we provide the best services we can to the residents. However, without funding, that becomes difficult. If funding is cut on top of the additional expenses that we have incurred during this response effort, including the loss in sales tax and loss of income to our residents in the county, we will have to look at cutting programs and services.

For more information about the novel Coronavirus, visit Madison County at <https://www.madisoncounty.ny.gov/2479/Coronavirus-COVID-19>, call the Madison County non-medical COVID-19 Hotline at 315-366-2770.

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