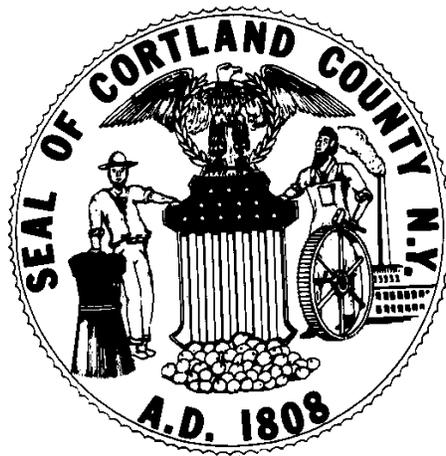


***New York State Police Reform and Reinvention  
Collaborative for Cortland County***



Dated: March 18, 2021

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## **Introduction**

Pursuant to the Governor's Executive Order 203 New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative issued on June 20, 2020, the County of Cortland created a Work Plan Panel to develop a work plan and process to focus on the Cortland County Sheriff's Department deployments, strategies, policies, procedures, practices and any needed improvements to the aforementioned. While collaboration with other agencies and municipalities occurred throughout this process, based upon the Governor's Executive Order and recommended work plan, it was determined the focus of the panel's work plan would be limited to the Sheriff's Department since it is the sole law enforcement department under the auspices and authority of the Cortland County Legislature. Other municipalities with law enforcement departments are handling their own reviews. After input was received, the final plan was modified as necessary and submitted to the legislature for ratification. Once ratified, it will be submitted to New York State by April 1, 2021.

There were multiple versions of this plan. Version 1 was the draft plan completed by the Work Plan Panel, which was intended for input by community stakeholders and constituents through a series of meetings held and a community-wide survey that was distributed. Version 2 was the modified draft plan that will incorporate the comments, concerns and input gathered from the key stakeholders through the meetings. Pursuant to the Governor's Executive Order, it was available for public comment prior to ratification by the Cortland County Legislature. Modifications were implemented as deemed necessary and this finalized plan has been submitted to the Cortland County Legislature for ratification and subsequently will be submitted to the State.

### **I. Phase 1: Planning**

#### ***A. Work Plan Panel Formation and Process***

The panel was comprised of Paul Heider, Chairperson of the Cortland County Legislature, Susan Wilson, Cortland County Legislator, Mark Helms, Cortland County Sheriff, Budd Rigg, Cortland County Undersheriff, Pastor John North, Clergy Representative and Pastor of The Chapel in Cortland and Scott Ochs, Professor and Chair of the Criminal Justice

Programs at Tompkins Cortland Community College and Cortland County resident. The Work Plan Panel clearly recognized the importance and necessity of engaging and facilitating communities and stakeholders in the process of creating a work plan and developing a report for approval and submission by the Cortland County Legislature. Open invitations were extended to stakeholders, community members and representative groups from the community. Persons made their own decision whether to seek participation on the panel. Throughout the process, other key stakeholders were involved in the planning, information gathering and analytical steps applied in the development of the plan and recommendations for change or improvement. Examples of the key stakeholders who were asked for input include the District Attorney, Public Defender, persons involved with the Black Lives Matter movement, pertinent officials of local municipalities, local colleges, social service agencies, the courts, other law enforcement agencies, those utilizing services or having interaction with the department, faith-based community members and other community members. The Work Plan Panel held organizational and planning team meetings on July 9, 2020, October 6, 2020, October 29, 2020, November 12, 2020, December 29, 2020 and January 5, 2021, and also met after all community outreach sessions. Additional meetings with the Panel members were held to answer out questions from the community and to finalize the Plan for submission.

### ***B. Community Stakeholders Initial Outreach and Meetings***

Early in the process, a concentrated effort was initiated by the department and panel members to reach out to other law enforcement agencies, clergy, human service and mental health agencies, individuals, groups and local representatives of the Black Lives Matter movement to ensure a diverse group from the County, including those that represent or are part of marginalized persons and populations would be invited and asked for input at sessions. Separate outreach meetings were held later and are described below. The Sheriff's Department and Cortland County Legislative Chair ensured meetings were opened to a wide range of groups and individuals, and additional efforts were implemented to enhance contact and outreach to persons and groups who interact more frequently with, or are served by, the Sheriff's Department. Electronic and written correspondence and invitations were sent, open meetings with remote access were held, and a survey about Sheriff's Department operations, services and public needs was

distributed to community members. The survey was professionally designed and implemented by Mary Cannito-Coville, Ph.D., Assistant Professor in the Sociology/Anthropology Department at SUNY Cortland. Due to the comprehensive nature of the survey and its distribution, coupled with staffing and COVID challenges faced by all involved, the summary will not be available at the time the report is due to New York State. However, results will be publicly published and posted through a web link that will be created in the Sheriff's Department web page.

On December 1, 2020 an initial outreach and virtual meeting was held by the County Legislature at which the Cortland County Sheriff's Department shared a presentation to familiarize the public with operations, procedures and internal and external operations of the department. A PowerPoint presentation was used and is referenced in Appendix 1 of this report.

Additional community stakeholders meetings were scheduled as highlighted below and results are discussed in Section II of this plan. Sessions with the District Attorney and Public Defender and a session with representatives of clergy were held, and the results thereof are outlined in Section II of this plan as well.

### ***C. Synopsis of Cortland County Sheriff's Department Design, Operations, Policies and Procedures***

A link to the Department's PowerPoint presentation is provided here and in Appendix 1. It offers a comprehensive overview of the Sheriff's Department's current operations including; divisions and units, programs and services, data, various policies and procedures, complaint processes, county demographic data and data related to requests for services, including 911 calls. The link provided here is to the publicly accessible Cortland County Legislature's web page. Once in the link, click on "**CCSO Presentation 12 1 2020**" to download the presentation.

Link: [http://cortlandcountyny.iqm2.com/Citizens/Detail\\_Meeting.aspx?ID=2800](http://cortlandcountyny.iqm2.com/Citizens/Detail_Meeting.aspx?ID=2800)

## 1. Administration

As noted in the PowerPoint, in an effort to provide comprehensive public service and safety, the Department is comprised of various divisions and has multiple units and services under each division. The Administration includes the Sheriff, the Undersheriff, two captains and three lieutenants. In the recent past, the Sheriff implemented changes to ensure a supervisor is assigned and available every day for each shift. The around the clock supervisory component enhances public safety and service, and reinforces accountability. The Administration as well as supervisors in divisions and sub-units investigate complaints lodged against officers by members of the community. The department adheres to federal and state laws and numerous state rules enacted and promulgated concerning complaints, use of force, deadly force, rules for traffic stops and pursuits, disciplinary matters and personnel records.

The Sheriff's Department is committed to continued collaboration with the Cortland County Legislature, mental health agencies, probation, social services, substance abuse services and related agencies to explore and develop effective and enhanced methods to assist community members and offenders in need.

***Future Endeavors:*** Sheriff Helms is actively pursuing accreditation of the Cortland County Sheriff's Department. This is a cumbersome undertaking and goes beyond the minimum state regulations. For example, with accreditation, all officers will be required to complete twenty one hours of additional, annual in-service training (NYS Law Enforcement Accreditation Program 2020, 2015). This initiative demonstrates the department's commitment to provide the highest quality programs and highly trained officers to serve the community. Accreditation is being pursued to enhance and improve existing services for the public as well as offenders, to augment internal operations and ensure the highest quality standards remain an integral part of the mission of the department.

The accreditation process is ongoing and the Sheriff will report updates to the Cortland County Judiciary and Public Safety Committee on an annual basis to keep the County Legislature informed.

## 2. Complaint Investigation and Training

In comparison to the total number of calls received and handled by the department, the number of complaints lodged against officers is extremely low. Use of force situations are and must be investigated in accordance with already established state laws and mandates. The department's written use of force is regulated by and complies with established law, and is included in the presentation. As noted above, the department adheres to state laws and numerous state rules enacted and promulgated concerning complaints, use of force, deadly force, search and seizure practices, disciplinary matters and personnel records. The Cortland County Sheriff's Department's Use of Force policy can be found online at <https://www.cortland-co.org/DocumentCenter/View/8430/420-Use-of-Force-Policy>.

The current department administration has nearly tripled training endeavors over the last several years in response to changes in law enforcement and community needs, mandated programs and services, the department's own new initiatives and the desire to provide the best quality services possible. The focuses of extensive training topics are noted in the presentation. They include but are not limited to:

- de-escalation techniques
- use of force
- use of less than lethal weapons such as tasers and pepper spray
- effective communication strategies
- the use of Narcan in drug overdoses
- topics in diversity and challenges that face special populations and marginalized persons and groups.

In addition to the ongoing training that is implemented after becoming a member of the Cortland County Sheriff's Department, there is also a rigorous training process to become a Cortland County Sheriff's Officer, which is outlined below and subject to change:

Training for a Cortland County Sheriff's Officer starts with the Police Academy upon being hired and additional training continues throughout the course of an officer's career. Once the officer completes the Police Academy, they then begin an extensive field-training

program. At the completion of the field training program, the officer is then assigned to a shift on the Road Patrol. Each phase of training is described as follows:

### Police Academy

Once a candidate is hired as a police officer for the Cortland County Sheriff's Office, they are sent to the Police Academy for basic training. Although our agency utilizes different regional police academies depending on scheduling, each academy is required by the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services to complete an approved curriculum and minimum hours.

The Municipal Police Training Council currently requires a minimum of 699 hours for the Basic Course of Police; the topics include, but are not limited to:

Constitutional Law, Discretionary Powers, Ethics and Professionalism, Physical Fitness and Wellness, Procedural Justice, Laws of New York State, Defensive Tactics, Emergency Medical Services, Firearms, Cultural Diversity/Bias Related Incidents, Persons with Disabilities, Domestic Violence, Sex Crimes, Missing and Abducted Children, Animal Abuse, Human Trafficking, Mental Health, Physical Force and Deadly Physical Force and De-escalation.

Many of the regional police academies that we utilize far exceed the minimum required training hours.

### Field Training

Upon graduation from the Police Academy the recruit officer will then complete a 16 week Field Training program. During the 16 weeks, the recruit officer will ride with a certified field training officer. A field training officer is an experienced officer, who has been certified by DCJS to train recruit officers. The recruit officers will apply what they learned in the Police Academy to "real life" situations. At the end of each shift a daily observation report is completed by the training officer, on the report the recruit's performance is evaluated on a wide variety of topics and it is reviewed by both the training officer and the recruit. At the end of the 16 weeks the recruit officer is given a written and scenario based test in order to determine if they are ready to be on their own or if additional training is necessary.

### Probationary Period

From the date of hire a candidate is required to complete a probationary period of 18 months, at any point during that probationary period if the candidate, fails to meet the performance standards and expectations, the candidate will be dismissed immediately without recourse.

Additionally, all police officers of the Cortland County Sheriff's Office are expected to complete a minimum of 21 hours of trainings each year (a standard set by NYS Accreditation). Most officers complete more training than the desired minimum. On top of that, daily shift briefings are held where training is provided on many of the day to day topics and activities.

A police officer is trained from the day they start employment until the day they retire. This is the only way to ensure that every officer is well educated as well as prepared for the ever-changing challenges they will face during their career as a police officer.

**Future Endeavors:** The Sheriff's Department has added a compliment/complaint link to their webpage (<https://www.cortland-co.org/351/County-Sheriffs-Office>) that will allow citizens to offer comments including positive feedback or concerns about their experiences with the department's officers and staff. The information will be used as part of a larger effort to continuously analyze what is working well and what areas need to be enhanced or improved.

Upcoming training events will focus on cultural bias and de-escalation techniques. Training will continue as needed in relation to new state laws, initiatives and regulations, officer and public safety issues, and other community needs.

### **3. Department Units and Divisions**

Divisions in the department include Road Patrol and Investigation, Corrections and the Civil Division and Records. As is summarized in the PowerPoint, extensive services and subunits fall under each division. Based upon the Governor's Executive Order, the focus of this plan is on public law enforcement, namely the Road Patrol Division. However, comprehensive information about all departmental operations are contained in the PowerPoint presentation.

In addition to law enforcement and criminal investigations, the Road Patrol unit also offers K-9 Services, a School Resource Officer, specialized patrols, field training oversight, accident investigations and a Tactical Response Unit (TRU). The TRU operates in conjunction with other agencies' officers and does not adapt or implement paramilitary procedures. Rather, equipment, operations and tactical vehicles are used to maintain officer and public safety as well as to safely negotiate situations. The goal is for safe outcomes for all involved including hostile individuals. For example, specially designed vehicles may be used to assist with the safe extraction of persons and victims from a hostage situation or barricaded person crisis. TRU officers are highly trained in areas of negotiation and de-escalation techniques. See the presentation for additional information and details.

Nationwide trends have indicated increases in hate crimes in the last few years (Allam, Hannah 2020). The Sheriff's Department follows Federal and State guidelines, and collaborates with the local District Attorney and other agencies as needed if an alleged hate crime occurs. In the most recent year for crime data collection, New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services published that two hate crimes were reported in Cortland County and were under the jurisdiction of the Cortland City Police (Hate Crime Incident 12/2020). Recognition and awareness training is provided to officers and investigators.

***Future Endeavors:*** The department will explore the possibilities of implementing and purchasing body worn cameras (BWC) for officers and dashboard cameras (Dash Cams) for patrol vehicles. BWC and Dash Cams offer valuable tools for officers, members of the public and the individuals that officers interact with, but there are obvious costs for the equipment. Training on cultural biases, hate crime awareness and a multitude of other areas will continue to be provided, but it is important to note that training opportunities may require funding. It is recommended that the topic of body worn cameras be discussed at future Judiciary and Public Safety meetings moving forward.

#### 4. **Community Outreach and Special Units**

The Sheriff and Undersheriff are the administrators of the Cortland County Sheriff's Department. Both the Sheriff and Undersheriff strive to be involved with the community to

the greatest extent possible. They attend meetings, work with many groups and attend many events throughout Cortland County, which include, but are not limited to:

- Active Shooter
- Annual Toy Drive Event “Toys for Tots”
- Are U Okay
- Bicycle Rodeos
- Boater’s Safety Course
- Career Day
- Career Talks at the Middle School/High School
- Car Seat Education Program
- Chemical Dependency Subcommittee
- Community Communication Group
- Cortland Area Communities That Care
- Cortland County Core Advisory Group for Emergency Preparedness
- Cortland County Criminal Justice Advisory Board
- Cortland Morning Rotary
- County Fair
- Demonstration K-9
- Drug Awareness
- Drug Take-Back Event
- Drug Treatment Court
- Executive Order 203 Work Panel
- F.A.I.R.
- Fire Police Course
- Health Fair
- Identity Theft Protection Training
- Inmate Release Program
- Inmate Substance Abuse Counseling Program
- Inmate Work Program
- Internet Safety
- Internship Program

- Justice League
- Local Emergency Planning Committee
- Marine Patrols and Vessel Safety Checks
- NYS Healing Communities Group
- NYS Sheriff's Summer Camp
- Operation Safe Child
- Personal Safety
- Pink Badges
- Project Lifesaver
- Reentry and Transition Council
- School Programs
- Snowmobile Safety Course
- Speak Up
- Traffic Safety Board
- Yellow Dot

The School Resource Officer component exemplifies community policing standards and ideals. Focuses include collaborating with schools, parents and agencies and problem solving rather than arrest. The department and the unit are very aware of the "school to prison pipeline" dilemma and take steps to avoid actions that may lead to negative outcomes. For example, in addition to officer training, a contract is established with the BOCES District that defines roles and responsibilities. The unit strives to facilitate trust and communication with students, educational staff and community members.

In an effort to foster positive community relations and deliver community policing approaches, members of the Road Patrol Division regularly attend community outings and events. Examples include the Cortland County Junior Fair, Cincinnatus Fireman's Field Days, Marathon Maple Festival, Cortland County 4<sup>th</sup> of July Fireworks, Health Department events – bike rodeos, car seat check points, health fairs and rabies clinics, Boater Safety Course, Snowmobile Safety Course, Citizens Response to Active Shooter Event Course, Fire Police Certification Course, Local School Events – open houses & fairs, Cops on Top – Special Olympics and the Torch Run, Coffee with a Cop, Salvation Army Red Kettle –

Badges & Bells. Additional community outreach programs include the Child Safety Seat and Operation Safe Child ID programs, the Drug Takeback initiative, Project Life Saver and various STOP DWI awareness projects. Examples of outreach and numerous community partners are provided in the PowerPoint presentation.

Additional specialized patrol units are provided in an effort to augment public safety and service to the community. Examples include Snowmobile Patrol, Navigation Patrol and the K-9 Program.

***Future Endeavors:*** The department will continue to offer community outreach and expand approaches as warranted and as feasible. In an effort to provide community outreach and to promote services, the department has a comprehensive web page and has other public social media accounts including Facebook, Twitter and the Sheriff App. These will be maintained and enhanced as needed.

## **5. Diversity and Employment in the Road Patrol Division**

The Sheriff's Department must adhere to New York State and local Civil Service laws and regulations as they pertain to the recruitment, employment and promotion of law enforcement officers. Despite stringent rules and regulations outside the control of the department, the administration has been able to recruit, employ and maintain a diversified work force. In collaboration with area colleges, the department offers internship experiences to college students that provide an experiential learning experience and may assist in recruitment.

A link to county demographic information compiled by the United Census Bureau is provided here and in Appendix 1. Link:

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/cortlandcountynewyork>

The administration of the department coupled with labor contract agreements ensure actions are taken to maintain physical and mental health and wellness and to provide proper support services to officers. Examples are provided in the presentation. Services include consultation with supervisors and referrals to counseling and outside agencies as needed.

***Future Endeavors:*** The department will continue to attempt to ensure a diversified workforce through recruitment and training efforts. In addition, collaborative ventures with area agencies and outside resources will be explored.

## **II. Phase 2: Listening and Learning**

### **A. *Listening Sessions***

Multiple listening sessions that also offered remote participation were held with the public and stakeholders. The first was generally focused while subsequent sessions sought to focus with specific groups, service areas and stakeholders. The first Listening Session with the legislature and community stakeholders occurred on December 1, 2020. Additional Listening Sessions with community stakeholders were held on January 12, 2021 9:30 - 10:30am, January 14, 2021 11:00 - 12:00pm and January 19, 2021 1:00 - 2:00pm. A listening session for municipal leaders occurred on January 21, 2021 6:00 - 8:00pm. Additional listening sessions were scheduled in January with the District Attorney, Public Defenders and faith-based community leaders.

At these sessions, the plan was shared and input was requested. Input is summarized in this section of the plan. Changes were implemented as deemed appropriate and workable. Future considerations were also noted.

#### **1. Listening Session 1: Stakeholder Meeting No. 1, December 1, 2020**

Listening Session 1 was an open and announced public session of the Cortland County Legislature in which the Sheriff's Department provided a presentation of its structure, operations, services, mission and efforts to engage and collaborate with the public it serves. Attention was also paid to services that are provided for offenders.

#### **2. Listening Session 2: Stakeholder Meeting No. 2, January 14, 2021 9:30-10:30am**

Listening Session 2 was the first focused session and concentrated on mental health populations, experiences and challenges. The Work Plan Panel felt it paramount to invite community members to this session while agencies would be invited to a later

session. This would ensure input about mental health services and needs, and an opportunity to be heard by persons who may have family members, friends or personal experiences with the department. Only one panel member was unable to attend and three community persons attended the meeting. They shared concerns about systemic mental health treatment and needed services for severely mentally ill persons including their own family members. Much was shared about their concerns for approaches in the overall mental health system including effects of medication, stigma, labeling and public attitudes about mental illness. All noted they have experienced favorable outcomes with Sheriff Department's officers and appreciated their caring attitudes and involvement in their personal situations. They added the department's high visibility at public events fosters positive relations. They suggested that ongoing collaboration, education, and training are needed for all involved in service delivery. They noted their observations of collaboration among Sheriff's Department staff and intervention agencies.

***Future Endeavors:*** The department is committed to seeing these positive processes continue and is open to ways to enhance collaboration.

3. **Listening Session 3:** Stakeholder Meeting No. 3, January 14, 2021 11:00am-12:00pm

Listening Session 3 concentrated on substance abuse and mental health services. All but one panel member attended and three substance abuse and mental health services professionals from Family and Children's Counseling Services participated in the meeting. They shared the importance of the need for continued collaboration with the Sheriff's Department, especially the Corrections Division. They noted favorable experiences and outcomes in dealing with their consumers and the Road Patrol Division. Much of their work is also with the Corrections Division – jail officers and administrators – as the service agency programs render inpatient referrals for inmates. They spoke highly of the professional relationships, but added conversation needs to continue, as there are constant regulatory and procedural changes in the processes. The department noted their willingness to continue conversations and collaboration.

These endeavors support the department's commitment to community policing and public services.

**Future Endeavors:** The practitioners indicated the need for enhanced communication and follow-up in relation to officers handling of drug overdose and administering emergency assistance such as Narcan injections. They suggested such data allows them to analyze the scope of overdose problems and needs for treatment outreach. Future conversation will occur about possible methods and processes that may assist in this process.

4. **Listening Session 4:** Stakeholder Meeting No. 4, January 19, 2021 1:00pm-2:00pm

Listening Session 4 focused on re-entry services for offenders. Topics of discussion including housing needs, lowering recidivism, substance abuse and mental health services. All but one panel member attended and four professional services providers from Catholic Charities participated in the meeting. They shared the need for continued collaboration with the Sheriff's Department, especially the Corrections Division. They noted favorable experiences and outcomes in dealing with their consumers and the Road Patrol Division. Most of their work is with incarcerated persons and members of the Corrections Division – jail officers and administrators – as this service agency's programs facilitate referrals and processes for re-entry services for inmates. The agency members spoke highly of the department's professional relationships and quality treatment of persons the agency serves. Impacts on recidivism among their consumer population receiving collaborated services have been positive. The department noted their willingness to continue conversations and collaboration. These endeavors support and enhance the department's commitment to provide community policing and exemplary public services. COVID limitations currently inhibit the visitation of service providers to the jail, but throughout COVID the Corrections Divisions ensures proper services are provided and referrals are initiated as warranted to facilitate effective releases and follow-up.

**Future Endeavors:** As COVID eases and state, local health department and executive stipulations allow, collaboration with service providers will continue and on-site contact with offenders will be reinstated.

5. **Listening Session 5:** Stakeholder Meeting No. 5, January 21, 2021 6:00pm-7:00pm

Invitations were sent on December 22, 2020 to sixteen leaders from county municipalities for a meeting held on January 21, 2021 6:00-8:00pm. As in all Listening Sessions, remote video participation was also provided. Two municipal leaders, the Mayors of Cortland and Marathon, attended and offered comments highlighting consistent favorable interactions with the department. The Mayor of Cortland attested to positive collaboration between the County and City law enforcement agencies. The Mayor of Marathon indicated that his constituents and he appreciated the presence of County law enforcement officers in their community. Both mayors inquired about the possibilities of providing body worn cameras (BWC) to officers and dashboard cameras (Dash Cams) in patrol vehicles. The department discussed their desire to obtain BWC and Dash Cams, but costs and maintenance of equipment, maintaining and storing data and constant changes in technology present realistic challenges in this process.

***Future Endeavors:*** The department will continue to explore the possibility of obtaining BWCs and dash cams and explore possible collaborative ventures with other agencies. The fiscal challenges faced by the county cannot be ignored but there is commitment to explore the feasibility of these options. The department is committed to continued collaboration with the Cortland City Police Department.

**6. Listening Session 6:** Stakeholder Meeting No. 6 – Clergy Representatives, January 26, 2021 1 PM – 2 PM

On January 26, 2021 at 1:00 PM a meeting was held with local clergy to discuss Executive Order 203 with members of the local clergy to learn of their experiences with the Cortland County Sheriff's Department. Attendees included Chairman Paul Heider, Sheriff Mark Helms, Undersheriff Budd Rigg, Legislator Susan Wilson, Pastor John North, Pastor Tim Mowers, Reverend Vicki Burtson, Michael Mowers and Deputy Clerk Savannah Hempstead.

Reverend Vicki Burtson spoke of experiences with the Cortland County Sheriff's Department. She noted the Black Lives Matter protest on the Village Green last summer was a positive experience. There was outreach with community members and a peaceful protest occurred. In August of 2015 the Sheriff's Department was called to help deal with a situation with someone who was not mentally stable. The officer had apparent training and

de-escalated the situation quickly. Overall, she was extremely happy with the Sheriff's Department, and believes that their collaboration with the community members and clergy is outstanding.

Pastor Tim Mowers said that he has had some interactions with the Sheriff's Department and appreciates all of the local law enforcement. He mentioned that the Calvary Baptist Church hosts the Fellowship of Church meetings, and has asked the Sheriff's Department to assist with traffic control. The Sheriff's Department is always available to help and is a pleasure to work with.

Pastor John North spoke of a couple examples of experiences that he has had with the Sheriff's Department. He reported the Sheriff's deputies are well trained and de-escalated the situations. They know individuals in the community and are able to relate to the people that they are getting calls about. This illustrated positive community policing. It is apparent to him that the Sheriff is there to help, not to "put down the hammer".

Michael Mower made a suggestion of having a video or something similar to inform the public as to what they should do in certain situations with law enforcement. Sheriff Helms said that that was a good idea. It was suggested that overall, people need to listen to lawful requests and directions from the officers to keep everyone safe and to be able to handle the situations at hand. Tim Mower suggested using the video when presentations are given at the high schools.

Pastor North asked if any of the Sheriff's deputies engage in patrol actions similar to City Police Officer, Jesse Abbott. It was noted he walks on Main Street interacting with community members. Sheriff Helms said that all of the Sheriff's Department officers function like Jesse Abbott. They cannot walk up and down Main Street, but they make connections and take the time to talk to the community members everywhere they go, which helps them to build relationships.

7. **Listening Session 7:** Stakeholder Meeting with Cortland County District Attorney and Public Defender, February 2, 2021

A specific meeting with the District Attorney and Public Defender was held on February 2, 2021. Discussion focused on the need for state funding support for criminal justice mandates and initiatives. While all agreed body worn cameras may provide an effective tool for law enforcement and enhance officer accountability, there are practical challenges beyond costs of the equipment. Data storage presents additional costs and staffing requirements. The county legislature will need to determine in future meetings whether they will allocate the funds and resources for the equipment, maintenance, data storage and staffing for this endeavor. Overall, support was voiced for the focus of this plan and the department's openness and practice of regularly reviewing policies.

## **7. Survey Results**

As described earlier in this plan, a survey focusing on the Sheriff's Department operations, services and public needs was distributed to community members. As indicated above, the survey was professionally designed and implemented by Mary Cannito-Coville, Ph.D., Assistant Professor in the Sociology/Anthropology Department at SUNY Cortland. Due to the comprehensive nature of the survey and its wide distribution, combined with staffing and COVID challenges faced by all involved, the summary will not be available at the time the report is due to New York State. However, results will be publicly published and posted through a web link that will be created in the Sheriff's Department web page.

## **III. Phase 3: Public Comment and Ratification**

Executive Order 203 requires that the plan be posted for public comment. On February 11, 2021, a special open session and public hearing of the legislature was held to allow the public the opportunity to voice any concerns. In addition, it was announced at the session that comments and input would be accepted until March 15, 2021. The plan will then be revised to incorporate public comment and be finalized for local legislative ratification. At the special session, Mr. Heider, Chair of the Legislature, individually invited members of the public and Cortland County Legislature to speak. Three members of the public offered comments and questions. The first individual asked questions about civilian review processes and about policies governing officers wearing expressive clothing while off duty. A specific example of wearing clothing exhibiting the confederate flag. Sheriff Helms noted at this time there is improvement for increased state and federal oversight of police

actions. At this time, there is not a civilian review board in place based upon recent and anticipated oversight by other authorities. In addition, as noted earlier in the report, efforts will be initiated to create a department web link for citizens to offer a comments, suggestions and concerns about interactions with the department. That link is now live on the Sheriff's page of the Cortland County website. Any policies regarding off duty clothing worn by officers fall under the purview of the administration of the Sheriff's Department rather than this panel. When creating policy, the administration takes into consideration applicable laws, regulations, court divisions, labor contract, labor negotiations as required by the Taylor Law, employee safety and public safety.

A second speaker identified herself as a mental health professional and the Director of Community Services. She expressed praise for the department's exceptional commitment to collaboration with mental health services and those in need.

The third individual, identified as a longtime resident and retired New York State Trooper offered support of the plan and the department.

Members of the legislature were then asked for input. Several spoke while others indicated they were present to listen. Of those who spoke, several expressed support for the plan, and the department approaches and public service. Two members raised concerns related to creating more detailed timeline for action. For example, rather than exploring implementing a web link for comments, it was recommended that the department simply implement the link. The Sheriff has posted the link to the website. The issue of expediting the purchase of body worn cameras was also raised, but this requires adherence to legislative and budgetary processes and regulations. Praise for accreditation efforts were offered and acknowledgement of the challenges of becoming accredited were noted.

A second member of the legislature also noted he would like to see a more detailed timeline for implementation of changes. He also raised concern that the plan did not address racial disparity noted in Cortland County's arrest, conviction and sentencing rates as published by the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services. Panel members noted that a link to the data is provided in Appendix 1 of the plan. The data is not broken down by department, rather figures represent the aggregate sum for the entire county. All agree a diversified work force is paramount to dealing with racial disparity and the sheriff is

involved in statewide civil service reform efforts. The state legislative and executive authorities must change the civil service laws and regulations that curtail diversified hiring. Localities cannot. In addition, the department is increasing training efforts as noted in this plan to address cultural bias, de-escalation techniques and effective communication strategies.

The final member of the public, also a member of the media, who spoke inquired as to why a person of color was not on the panel and asked about officer accountability measures. It was explained that early in the process, open invitations to participate in the panel were extended to members of the community and representative groups. Persons then made their own choices about participation. Chairman Heider noted outreach to persons of color and representative groups also occurred through one to one meetings and stakeholder sessions. The sheriff has explained officer accountability and complaint procedures in his PowerPoint presentation at a public meeting and contained in this report. In addition, the department will take action to implement a web link for citizens' concerns about officers' actions or departmental matters and recent and future state and federal oversight of officers' actions will increase accountability.

#### **IV. Additional Public Comment**

The period for additional public comment is February 12 through March 15, 2021. All questions and comments that have been answered out in either written or verbal form have been posted to the Sheriff's page on the County website at: <http://www.cortland-co.org/DocumentCenter/View/9697/Questions-and-Answers>.

**Executive Order 203 stipulates: "Certify with New York State: Submit your certification that your locality has met the requirements of Executive Order No.**

**203 to the Division of the Budget by April 1, 2021."**

#### **V. Going Forward**

The Sheriff's Department with the support of the Cortland County Legislature will implement the plan and address the goals, concerns and future endeavors specified in this plan. The department will continue to monitor community concerns and engage the public

and stakeholders through outreach efforts, meetings, social media platforms and others measures as needed. The legislature must do the same.

The timeline going forward is not determined by this panel. Rather it is the County Legislature that must determine its commitment to going forward. The department will continuously review and develop policies and proposals, facilitate training and accountability, garner community input and address public safety needs. It is the legislature that must determine what they are willing to support and fund – positions, equipment, training, educational opportunities for officers that will expand their professional development and abilities to serve the community and competitive salaries and benefits.

**All Draft Versions and the Final Plan Version Compiled and Submitted By:**

The Work Plan Panel for the New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative for Cortland County **Members:**

Paul Heider, Chairperson of the Cortland County Legislature

Susan Wilson, Member of the Cortland County Legislature

Mark Helms, Cortland County Sheriff

Budd Rigg, Cortland County Undersheriff

Pastor John North, Clergy Representative and Pastor of The Chapel

Savannah Hempstead, Deputy Clerk of the Cortland County Legislature

Scott Ochs, Professor and Chair of the Criminal Justice Programs at Tompkins Cortland Community College and Cortland County Resident

## Appendix 1

Cortland County Sheriff's Department PowerPoint Presentation 12/1/20:  
[http://cortlandcountyny.igmp2.com/Citizens/Detail\\_Meeting.aspx?ID=2800](http://cortlandcountyny.igmp2.com/Citizens/Detail_Meeting.aspx?ID=2800)

Cortland County Sheriff's Department Web Site:  
<https://www.cortland-co.org/351/County-Sheriffs-Office>

U.S. Census Cortland County Demographic Information:  
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/cortlandcountynyork>

N.Y.S. Criminal Justice Index Crime Data as Reported by Cortland County Law Enforcement Agencies 2019:  
<https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/indexcrimes/Cortland.pdf>

N.Y.S. Criminal Justice Violent Crime Data as Reported by Cortland County Law Enforcement Agencies 2019:  
<https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/indexcrimes/2019-county-violent-rates.pdf>

N.Y.S. Criminal Justice Arrest and Disposition Rates Based on Race and Ethnicity for Cortland County 2019:  
<https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/dispositions-adult-arrestdemographics/2019/Cortland.pdf>

N.Y.S. Criminal Justice Hate Crime Data as Reported by Cortland County Law Enforcement Agencies 2019:  
<https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/hatecrimeincidents2019.pdf>

## References

Allam, Hannah 2020 FBI Report: Bias Motivated Killings At Record High Amid Nationwide Rise In Hate Crime NPR retrieved January 9, 2021 from <https://www.npr.org/2020/11/16/935439777/fbi-report-bias-motivated-killings-at-recordhigh-amid-nationwide-rise-in-hate-c>

Criminal Justice Statistics Hate Crime Incidents 12/2020 New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services retrieved on January 9, 2021 from <https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/hatecrimeincidents2019.pdf>

NYS Law Enforcement Accreditation Program 2020, 2015. Standards and Compliance Verification Manual, NYSDCJS [https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/ops/docs/accred/standards\\_compliance\\_verification\\_manual.pdf](https://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/ops/docs/accred/standards_compliance_verification_manual.pdf)