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HUDSON COUNTY  
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

RE:

BUDGET HEARING : TRANSCRIPT OF  
OF THE :  
HUDSON COUNTY BOARD OF : PROCEEDINGS  
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS :  
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O P E N S E S S I O N

Hudson County  
Administration Building,  
County Commissioners Chambers  
567 Pavonia Avenue  
Jersey City, New Jersey  
Wednesday, June 11, 2025  
5:30 p.m.

B E F O R E:

ANTHONY ROMANO, Chairman  
YRAIDA APONTE-LIPSKI, Commissioner  
ROBERT BASELICE, Commissioner  
FANNY CEDEÑO, Commissioner  
ALBERT CIFELLI, Commissioner  
KENNETH KOPACZ, Commissioner  
WILLIAM O'DEA, Commissioner  
CARIDAD RODRIGUEZ, Commissioner  
JERRY WALKER, Commissioner

A L S O P R E S E N T:

CHERYL FULLER, Director, Department of Finance  
and Administration

JOHN INAGAKI, Deputy Director, Department of  
Finance and Administration

ABRAHAM ANTUN, County Administrator

WILLIE ORTIZ, County Commissioner Clerk

Reported By: Shari Cathey, CCR, RPR

1 THE CLERK: This is the 2025 Budget  
2 hearing, July 11th, 2025. Commissioner  
3 Aponte-Lipski.

4 COMMISSIONER APONTE-LIPSKI: Here.

5 THE CLERK: Commissioner Baselice.

6 COMMISSIONER BASELICE: Here.

7 THE CLERK: Commissioner Cedeño.

8 COMMISSIONER CEDEÑO: Yes.

9 THE CLERK: Commissioner Cifelli.

10 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: Here.

11 THE CLERK: Commissioner Kopacz.

12 COMMISSIONER KOPACZ: Here.

13 THE CLERK: Commissioner O'Dea.

14 COMMISSIONER O'DEA: Here.

15 THE CLERK: Commissioner Rodriguez.

16 COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: Here.

17 THE CLERK: Commissioner Walker.

18 COMMISSIONER WALKER: Here.

19 THE CLERK: Chairman Romano.

20 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: Here.

21 THE CLERK: Please stand for the  
22 Pledge of Allegiance.

23 (Flag Salute.)

24 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: Willie, before we,  
25 Mr. Clerk, before we start, the Commissioner of the

1 Town of Secaucus have asked that -- the Mayor would  
2 like to speak. So honorable -- the Honorable Mayor  
3 of the City of Secaucus, Mike Gonnelli, please.

4 MAYOR GONNELLI: Thank you. Thank  
5 you so much, Chairman. And thank you for listening  
6 to me. You know, in Secaucus, we worked really hard  
7 to keep taxes stable. In fact, our taxes were down  
8 all this year, and that was a tough thing to do to  
9 get taxes to go down. We have the same expenses as  
10 everybody else has.

11 But it comes to the County went up 30  
12 percent on an average home, that's \$400. An average  
13 home is \$400. When you have these homes that are  
14 built now, you're talking about 16, 18, \$2,000 in  
15 tax increase, you know, and I don't want to blame  
16 the County because I know it's not your fault. I  
17 really don't. I know that the formula comes out  
18 from the state, but the formula is really flawed. I  
19 just want everybody to take a look at that because  
20 it's really a flawed formula.

21 You know, we had two -- two sales, and  
22 they were both accepted. There were really small  
23 sales, \$75,000 each, and from that County taxes were  
24 up 30 percent. It's a tough thing for me to  
25 swallow, really tough thing for me to swallow. You

1 know, as the Mayor, I try to, again, to keep taxes  
2 stable, all of us. I really look at our record.  
3 You go back the last 12, 14 years, stable taxes.  
4 Now our taxes are going up, the County's. Not your  
5 fault, but it's the County's fault. Is there  
6 anything you can do to help us? I know Craig is not  
7 here, is he?

8 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: No.

9 MAYOR GONNELLI: I talked to Craig.  
10 I'm going to talk to Brian. I'm pleading with you  
11 guys to either hold it off, hold your budget off  
12 until sometimes we could get an agreement to figure  
13 out what we're going to do here. But that is a very  
14 large increase.

15 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: Mayor, the County  
16 Executive had spoke at the beginning of our caucus  
17 that he's going to work with you with shared  
18 services and some other ideas that he has.

19 MAYOR GONNELLI: Say that again. I'm  
20 trying to hear you.

21 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: The County  
22 Executive had spoken at the beginning of our caucus  
23 meeting before, and stated that he was going to be  
24 working with you with some ideas and also involving  
25 shared services.

1                   MAYOR GONNELLI: I don't know how  
2 much that's going to help. You know, we went up  
3 750,000 Open Space Tax. I called you, I asked you  
4 to cut it down to a penny, a half a cent. We would  
5 have saved \$350,000 that took place. But again,  
6 that didn't, and we went up over 6 million. It's a  
7 crazy number, crazy number. And that's going to be  
8 tough for me to sell to the people. They're going  
9 to blame me, and I'm going to say, it's not my  
10 fault. It's not your fault, but you guys are at  
11 fault.

12                   COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: Chairman, I  
13 kind of echo Mayor's comments. I'm a certified  
14 assessor and I kind of know what the background is.  
15 And I also spoke to Don Kenny about it earlier, and  
16 I think the Mayor is absolutely right. I mean, it's  
17 a -- it's a double whammy. The County levies gone  
18 up 20, \$24 million just across the board. And part  
19 of that has to get absorbed by every municipality,  
20 but Secaucus is a special case in the sense of  
21 equalization rate.

22                   I mean, you dropped almost 20, 24 percent,  
23 I think in the -- in the ratio. And unfortunately,  
24 that -- that's a problem of the formula, and there's  
25 nothing we can do about the formula, but let me ask

1 a question. The Mayor just asked if there's any way  
2 that we can delay the improvement or the approval of  
3 the budget in order to see if other avenues of -- of  
4 relief that he alluded to about perhaps some shared  
5 services or state aid or whatever can be  
6 accomplished. What, what would the impact of that  
7 be? Or what would the effect of that be? Is that  
8 a -- is that a possibility?

9 MAYOR GONNELLI: You want me to  
10 answer that?

11 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: Sure. I'd  
12 like somebody from the County to answer it but...

13 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: Donny, you want to  
14 come up? Did we get to ask that question?

15 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: Maybe Abe can  
16 answer that question.

17 MAYOR GONNELLI: You're tough to  
18 hear.

19 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: I'm sorry.

20 MAYOR GONNELLI: I'm turning my  
21 hearing aids up, but you're still tough to hear.

22 MR. ANTUN: Mr. Chairman, there's  
23 really nothing that we can do in terms of delaying  
24 the budget. I mean, there -- there may be things  
25 that we can work with the -- with our State

1 legislators to see if there's some type of  
2 assistance that can be given to Secaucus because of  
3 this unusual situation, but delaying, you know,  
4 delaying our budget isn't going to solve the issue.  
5 Really what they need is some type of --

6 MAYOR GONNELLI: Extraordinary aid.

7 MR. ANTUN: Exactly, and you know,  
8 it's not until the tax rate is struck so that -- you  
9 know, and that -- that's not going to happen for a  
10 bit yet, and you know, they -- they can receive  
11 some -- some State aid if there's -- if there's a  
12 willingness on the part of the State to assist them.  
13 But delaying our process is not going to help them.

14 MAYOR GONNELLI: I spoke to Senator  
15 Stack and Senator Stack works very hard. We waited  
16 until after election and this happened today after  
17 election. And so it's a really, really close -- I  
18 understand that. I understand you have to do your  
19 budget, but if there's something you could do to  
20 help Secaucus. I know Craig -- Craig talked to you  
21 or sent you an e-mail?

22 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: Well, we spoke at  
23 the beginning of the caucus.

24 COMMISSIONER BASELICE: Can I ask a  
25 question, Chairman?

1 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: Go ahead.

2 COMMISSIONER BASELICE: So Craig in  
3 the beginning did speak, Mayor. He said that, he  
4 would -- he's willing to work to ease the pain,  
5 shared services, state legislation, things of that  
6 sort. Hey, when do you think the tax rate can be  
7 struck?

8 MR. ANTUN: That will depend on, uh,  
9 how the other municipalities provide that  
10 information to Don Kenney. I mean, Don Kenney is  
11 here. He can probably answer that a lot better than  
12 me.

13 COMMISSIONER BASELICE: Oh, yeah.

14 MAYOR GONNELLI: You've got to ask  
15 him a question. You just asked him, you just asked  
16 a question. So Don can answer that.

17 COMMISSIONER BASELICE: Yeah. Yeah.  
18 The question was, Don, when -- when do you think the  
19 tax rates will, you'll start to strike the tax?

20 MR. KENNEY: Well, typically, I mean,  
21 I've got -- I've gotten most of the school budgets  
22 in and typically we start getting the certifications  
23 from the State after they adopt their budget. So  
24 maybe the end of June, maybe sometimes early July,  
25 it depends. And sometimes I know sometimes already

1 did an estimated third quarter, so there are no  
2 hurry.

3 MAYOR GONNELLI: Our budget is  
4 already adopted.

5 MR. KENNEY: Yeah.

6 MAYOR GONNELLI: So how can State aid  
7 help us.

8 MR. KENNEY: What happens is once  
9 your budget's adopted in the schools or adopted in  
10 the County, they all get sent down to DCA for  
11 certification. Once I get those certifications  
12 e-mailed to me, that gives me the green light to  
13 certify the rates.

14 MAYOR GONNELLI: But how does that  
15 kind of help us?

16 MR. KENNEY: Oh, I'm sorry.  
17 That's -- I answered the question, Mayor.

18 MR. ANTUN: I have seen, like I've  
19 been around a while. I have seen situations where  
20 if State aid is provided, where that could be  
21 inserted into the rate. I've seen it happen. It  
22 doesn't happen that often, but I have seen that  
23 happen. If -- if they bill, if the Governor's  
24 appropriation bill goes through and there's language  
25 stated in there that gives the tax board, the

1 priority to insert what in essence be a credit,  
2 that's how it would, even though your budget's  
3 already been adopted, I've seen that happen once a  
4 long time.

5 COMMISSIONER BASELICE: Yeah. I  
6 mean, Secaucus has seen an unprecedented increase,  
7 and the formula is what the formula is. It comes  
8 from the State. Is there any way that we as  
9 Commissioners can make a motion to try and assist  
10 one of our municipalities to, to, to encourage, to  
11 encourage State aid?

12 MR. ANTUN: I mean, you can certainly  
13 do a resolution asking that, you know, the State  
14 consider, you know, an appropriation to help the  
15 Town of Secaucus, but keep something in mind that  
16 the formula I think is constitutional, and -- and it  
17 would require a constitutional amendment.

18 COMMISSIONER BASELICE: I'm not  
19 looking to change the formula. I'm looking to see  
20 if we, as a Board, we have a municipality that has  
21 seen a very high increase, can we as a Board assist  
22 this municipality, which is one -- is one of my  
23 municipalities in requesting some special aid to  
24 assist them.

25 MR. ANTUN: Sure, you can. You can

1 do a resolution asking the Governor and the State  
2 legislature to -- to support an appropriation, a  
3 special assistance to the Town of Seacoast because  
4 of this situation.

5 MAYOR GONNELLI: I think that would  
6 be great if you did that. I think that would be a  
7 step forward process.

8 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: The first step  
9 is that that --

10 MAYOR GONNELLI: Listen, I have -- I  
11 have full faith in Senator Stack that he's going to  
12 help me, you know, and Craig Guy talked to you guys  
13 tonight, I know probably about shared services. So  
14 if we put our heads together, we could probably  
15 listen, we'll get, we're going up 6 million plus  
16 750,000. It's still going to have a tax increase,  
17 but if we get three or \$4 million from State aid,  
18 the tax increase would be a lot less.

19 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: But again, it  
20 sounds like a two-phase plan. One is to -- for us  
21 and to -- for the state legislators to -- to make  
22 that petition for special aid, whether it's shared  
23 services or -- or discretionary aid to the -- to the  
24 city of town, and then going back to DCA and see if  
25 we can get some credit and some relief in the actual

1 tax rate, the budget sort of --

2 MR. ANTUN: But the DCA component,  
3 Mr. Chairman, if I may, will only happen if we're  
4 successful in getting the Governor's budget to  
5 include --

6 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: Yeah, that's  
7 what I mean. Because that's the process, right?

8 MR. ANTUN: Because that language  
9 then gives DCA the authority to inform the tax  
10 board.

11 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: Step number  
12 one has to be some positive.

13 MAYOR GONNELLI: That would be step  
14 number one.

15 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: Positive  
16 feedback from the Legislature and the Governor's  
17 office in order to get some --

18 MAYOR GONNELLI: Believe me, I think  
19 Senator Stack will push it.

20 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: And I'm sure  
21 he will.

22 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: We can bring a  
23 resolution before, for the Board's Consideration.

24 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: For tomorrow,  
25 sure. And I think Bob and I would move that.

1 COMMISSIONER BASELICE: Yeah.

2 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: What did we do a  
3 few years ago? Remember when Hoboken's was like 20,  
4 remember we -- we got 20 percent or something in  
5 Hoboken a few years ago?

6 MR. ANTUN: It's happened in a lot  
7 of -- what's happening in Secaucus has happened in  
8 other towns.

9 MAYOR GONNELLI: It's not -- not --  
10 not 30 percent. That's the highest. That's the  
11 highest.

12 MR. ANTUN: I'm not talking about  
13 percent. I'm just talking about in terms of how,  
14 how this is impacted other towns in the past. I  
15 realized, you know, but yeah, that's -- that's a big  
16 hit.

17 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: If I can ask  
18 Don --

19 MAYOR GONNELLI: Again, we kept -- we  
20 strive really hard to keep our budget as level as  
21 possible. In fact, we went down a couple of cents.  
22 It's not a big deal. We went down a little bit.

23 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: If I can ask  
24 Don a question, Don, the issue with the sales that  
25 impacted drastically upon the Secaucus's

1 equalization rate. It sounds like they were  
2 somewhat aberrational, but -- but they were usable.

3 MR. KENNEY: Right. And usable is  
4 the term of art. I mean, I wouldn't say this year  
5 they were aberrational commissioner. One sale was,  
6 I think a 25-percent ratio. One was 30, and that's  
7 consistent with all the residential. I mean, the  
8 whole -- there were 161 residential sales and they  
9 were also 30. So if for some reason there was an  
10 appeal to knock those two sales out, that formula  
11 defaults to the residential ratio, which still would  
12 have been 30 percent.

13 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: Which is still  
14 going to not have a great effect. I mean, it's not  
15 going to have a -- it's not going to -- it's going  
16 to have a deleterious effect.

17 MR. KENNEY: If I could add one more  
18 thing, the reason there's such a big difference  
19 between last year and this year is last year, there  
20 was one sale commercial sale in a study that had a  
21 71-percent ratio, which, you know, could be even  
22 more aberrational. And you know, when you have  
23 that, and then you get this such a big drop this  
24 year, that's where that 30-percent change in the  
25 ratio comes from.

1 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: No, I  
2 understand.

3 MAYOR GONNELLI: I agree. You have  
4 no control of it.

5 MR. KENNEY: Right. I agree with  
6 you.

7 MAYOR GONNELLI: But if you could  
8 pass the resolution tonight, I really appreciate  
9 that.

10 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: Bob and I  
11 would move that for tomorrow. I'll move it tomorrow,  
12 as a late starter.

13 MAYOR GONNELLI: All right. Thank  
14 you.

15 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: Thank you. Thanks,  
16 man. Next speaker.

17 THE CLERK: No. You want us to move  
18 on?

19 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: Yeah.

20 THE CLERK: Adequate notice that this  
21 meeting has been provided as required by law. The  
22 first item is a resolution designated as Resolution  
23 No. 1 on the agenda. This resolution is to exceed  
24 the tax -- the County Tax Levy Limits and establish  
25 a Cap Bank as per NJSA 48:4-45.15. This was moved

1 by commissioner Kopacz and seconded by Chairman  
2 Romano at the Board's meeting of May 8. This is a  
3 fixed time for a public hearing on this resolution,  
4 which was advertised with notice for the hearing at  
5 this time.

6 Are there any speakers on this resolution?

7 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: Continue, Mr.  
8 Clerk.

9 THE CLERK: On the adoption -- motion  
10 to close the Public Hearing? All in favor?  
11 Opposed?

12 (Unanimous Aye.)

13 THE CLERK: On the adoption.

14 COMMISSIONER BASELICE: And this is  
15 which one, which one?

16 THE CLERK: Resolution No. 1. On the  
17 adoption of Resolution No. 1, Commissioner  
18 Aponte-Lipski.

19 COMMISSIONER APONTE-LIPSKI: Aye.

20 THE CLERK: Commissioner Baselice.

21 COMMISSIONER BASELICE: Yes.

22 THE CLERK: Commissioner Cedeño.  
23 Commissioner Cifelli.

24 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: Yes.

25 THE CLERK: Commissioner Kopacz.

1 COMMISSIONER KOPACZ: Yes.

2 THE CLERK: Commissioner O'Dea.

3 COMMISSIONER O'DEA: Yes.

4 THE CLERK: Commissioner Rodriguez.

5 COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: Yes.

6 THE CLERK: Commissioner Walker.

7 COMMISSIONER WALKER: Yes.

8 THE CLERK: Chairman Romano.

9 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: Yes.

10 THE CLERK: The next order of  
11 business is Resolution No. 2, authorized in the 2025  
12 Budget to be read by title. Is there a speaker --  
13 is there a sponsor and a second?

14 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: Sponsor.

15 COMMISSIONER APONTE-LIPSKI: Second.

16 THE CLERK: Commissioner  
17 Aponte-Lipski.

18 COMMISSIONER APONTE-LIPSKI: Aye.

19 THE CLERK: Commissioner Baselice.

20 COMMISSIONER BASELICE: Yes.

21 THE CLERK: Commissioner Cedeño.  
22 Commissioner Cifelli.

23 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: Yes.

24 THE CLERK: Commissioner Kopacz.

25 COMMISSIONER KOPACZ: Yes.

1 THE CLERK: Commissioner O'Dea.

2 COMMISSIONER O'DEA: Yes.

3 THE CLERK: Commissioner Rodriguez.

4 COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: Yes.

5 THE CLERK: Commissioner Walker.

6 COMMISSIONER WALKER: Yes.

7 THE CLERK: Chairman Romano.

8 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: Yes.

9 THE CLERK: The next order of  
10 business is a public hearing on the two -- Okay.

11 DIRECTOR FULLER: No, we're on  
12 Resolution No. 2. We just finished that one. I got  
13 it. I got it.

14 Be it resolved by the Commissioners of the  
15 County of Hudson that the budget therein set forth  
16 is hereby adopted and shall constitute an  
17 appropriation for the purpose of stated of the sums  
18 there in set forth appropriations and authorizations  
19 of the amount of \$453,180,876.11; \$13,567,744.59  
20 Open Space, Recreation, Farm and Historic  
21 Preservation.

22 General revenues, surplus anticipated \$52  
23 million. Miscellaneous revenues anticipated  
24 208,406,358.99. The Amount Raised by Taxation for  
25 County Purposes, \$453,180,876.11; General Revenues,

1 17 million -- 713,587,235.10.

2 General Appropriations: Operating  
3 Including Contingent 554,760,908.02; Capital  
4 Improvements, \$48,263,362.51; County Debt Service,  
5 47,188,278.98; Deferred Charges and Statutory  
6 Expenses, 63,374,585.59; Judgments, \$100.

7 Total General Appropriations,  
8 713,587,235.10. It is here --

9 COMMISSIONER O'DEA: No, no, no, no.  
10 You have to do the public hearing.

11 THE CLERK: The next order of  
12 business is the Public Hearing on the 2025 Hudson  
13 County budget. This is the time fixed for the  
14 Public Hearing on 2025 Hudson County budget, which  
15 is introduced May 8th, 2025 and advertising in the  
16 Star Ledger, with notice of the hearing for this  
17 time. All members of the public are requested to  
18 please limit their comments to a reasonable time.

19 Are there any speakers on the budget?

20 MS. WIDEMAN: Good evening. Hudson  
21 County employee and here to discuss the contract. I  
22 was informed that there would be a settlement, there  
23 will be a hearing, a caucus to some degree today  
24 regarding our contract. So I'm asking if anyone  
25 could explain to me anything about the contract.

1                   COMMISSIONER O'DEA: All I think from  
2 the perspective of a budget, that's a legitimate  
3 question. So there is a proposed settlement, which  
4 obviously would have to be voted on by your members.  
5 That proposed settlement creates a market adjustment  
6 to adjust salaries based on an issue that was raised  
7 by yourself and others concerning the salaries for  
8 titles vis-a-vis other counties, that if that  
9 contract is approved by the membership, that would  
10 result in this year, July of this year, substantive  
11 increases, probably equal to 20-percent of a  
12 person's salary in the current titles.

13                   They are, within the title of those that  
14 are in a one, I guess they're SS1s, right? That  
15 those individuals would be able to opt into an SS2  
16 sooner rather than later. And anyone who opted into  
17 that title would also receive a substantive increase  
18 of those percentages as we're later. I guess the  
19 question would be that if in case something like  
20 that occurred, without getting into details of  
21 numbers, would the -- is the budget before us, Abe,  
22 have the revenue in it, and the expenditures in it  
23 necessary to pay them beginning July 1?

24                   MR. ANTUN: Yes.

25                   COMMISSIONER O'DEA: Okay.

1 MS. WIDEMAN: Okay. All right.

2 Thank you.

3 MS. ALEXANDER: Thank you. Good  
4 evening, Commissioners, Sabura Alexander, Hudson  
5 County Family Services employee, Union President  
6 1697 AFSCME. I have a question for Ms. Fuller. So  
7 I heard the gentleman say something about a \$52  
8 million surplus. I anticipate a \$50 million  
9 surplus. So while we are in negotiation, I'm not  
10 here to discuss negotiations.

11 What I will say is that I know that our  
12 contract comes across your desk for ratification.  
13 And the way it's being proposed is we want to get  
14 the higher end percentages on the front end and not  
15 the back end. Because right now we're struggling,  
16 okay? We cannot afford to even live in Hudson  
17 County. Appointing Authority Elinor Gibney said  
18 that we cannot transfer out intergovernmental  
19 because she needs to stabilize the agency. We have  
20 other counties that are making way more than us for  
21 the same exact title.

22 So if we cannot transfer out because the  
23 County needs to be stabilized, then the County needs  
24 to understand that they need to consider that in  
25 terms of our salary and how we're going to make it.

1 We do not get cost of living for whatever strange  
2 reason, and I would like to pose that question. Why  
3 is it that we do not receive cost of living? I'm  
4 being told we're supposed to, but we're not. So I  
5 don't really know. I need some help with that.  
6 I'll research it.

7 But I would definitely like to ask the  
8 Commissioners, can you please tell me how the cost  
9 of living comes to Hudson County? When did it  
10 start? Why did it stop? Who stopped it? If it  
11 stopped, we need to know those things. You know,  
12 because everything's going up. Pension, medical,  
13 union dues, and yet the pay is pretty much the same.  
14 So we definitely need to look into that.

15 MR. ANTUN: Commissioner, those are  
16 items subject to negotiate.

17 MS. ALEXANDER: Cost of living  
18 subject to negotiations, when we're told we can't  
19 get it? Okay. Thank you. So I will definitely  
20 bring that back. Thank you.

21 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: Next speaker.

22 MS. ALBERT: Good evening, everyone.  
23 I'm Amy Albert. I have been before you in a  
24 different capacity before tonight. I'm here because  
25 I'm a member of the Public Defender's Office in

1 Hudson County. I'm speaking through my experience,  
2 but not on behalf of the office.

3 I have some concerns with regard to the  
4 health contract that is going to be reviewed by the  
5 jail and the RFP specifically. My job at Hudson  
6 County right now is always, as you guys know, to  
7 cause trouble, but particularly at this point, to  
8 defend people with serious mental illness who are  
9 appearing in front of the courts.

10 There have been, unfortunately, three  
11 suicides completed at the jail this year, and a  
12 number of my clients who are facing very substantial  
13 safety risks while at the jail. The folks who are  
14 guarding us today know me well because I'm  
15 constantly in the same courtrooms as them, and I'm  
16 as concerned for their safety as I am for the safety  
17 of my clients.

18 We have some procedures that need to  
19 change, and specifically, the way that the WellPath  
20 contract is currently geared disincentivizes, in my  
21 opinion, movement to hospitals when hospitalization  
22 is necessary, and what's happening is that folks who  
23 are either in severe medical distress or in severe  
24 mental health distress are not getting the care they  
25 need.

1 I have clients who have severely burned  
2 court officers. I have a client who has been  
3 awaiting transport to the federal -- to the Anne  
4 Klein Forensic Center, the health facility for folks  
5 who are not competent, for 10 months, and in the  
6 meantime, has bitten one of the court officers so  
7 badly it took a chunk out of his hand. And these  
8 people are remaining at the jail rather than being  
9 transported to the medical center.

10 Of particular concern to me is that about  
11 two months ago, as I mentioned to Chairperson Romano  
12 and both Commissioners Walker and O'Dea,  
13 Commissioner O'Dea actually brought it to my  
14 attention. A client of mine who I interviewed at 11  
15 o'clock via GTL was having drug overdose and other  
16 distress related to his age. He was 63. I informed  
17 the jail. He was brought into the services before,  
18 within WellPath, and unfortunately, 15 minutes  
19 later, when they went to check on him, he had died.

20 I'm very concerned about when the  
21 decisions are made to actually call in the  
22 ambulances versus not. And I'm not claiming that  
23 there's any malfeasance on anyone's part here. But  
24 what I do think is, unfortunately, as Chairman  
25 Romano, we've discussed, it's very expensive right

1 now for us to have hospital services that are  
2 connected to the jail. It's expensive because it  
3 requires several of the officers to go with our  
4 inmates to the hospital. But it's also expensive  
5 because unlike other places like Bergen County and  
6 Essex County, who have contracts that include a  
7 provider who has access to a hospital, we don't.  
8 And what that means is that certain of the services  
9 that our clients could get, which would make  
10 everybody safer, are not happening.

11 And that includes padded rooms for folks  
12 to be restrained without physical restraint. That  
13 includes not having the facilities on site to  
14 properly supervise people who are suicidal. And  
15 what that means is, for instance, I have a gentleman  
16 who has severe anxiety. It was determined that he  
17 was suicidal. He was stripped naked, as generally  
18 happens in these cases, to prevent him hanging  
19 himself with his clothing. And then because he was  
20 so anxious, when he came out of his cell, kind of  
21 rushed out, officers pepper sprayed him naked. This  
22 led to an incident in which he had his hand broken  
23 as they were trying to restrain him.

24 It's a completely unacceptable situation  
25 that happened last week. Not because anybody at the

1 jail did anything wrong, but because we're expecting  
2 people who are trained to subdue people who are able  
3 to control their physical bodies to do something  
4 that they're just not trained to do. And so I  
5 really urge you to consider, when you're thinking  
6 about this contract, think about whether there are  
7 providers who are applying for the RFP who already  
8 are connected with the hospital and have hospital  
9 privileges.

10 I know in other counties, their providers  
11 have those, Rutgers, for instance. I know there are  
12 many others. And I'd also ask that you consider  
13 whether our County mental health facility might be  
14 able to take on some of these roles. I know that  
15 Medicaid funds could be taken back from their use at  
16 the jail if people go to the County mental hospital.  
17 And so I wonder why that's not happening. I just  
18 want to make sure that as we're considering this  
19 contract, which is a substantial part of the budget,  
20 we're looking at \$15 million, I think, that we  
21 consider what part of that can actually be used  
22 efficiently to help folks so that I'm not getting  
23 calls even from COs saying, why is this lady who  
24 thinks that she's a famous musician still in our  
25 jail after 10 months? We're constantly trying to

1 keep people safe, and I can't do that unless we have  
2 the tools.

3 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: Amy, do you have a  
4 setup meeting with the Director about your concerns?

5 MS. ALBERT: We've been talking many,  
6 many times, and many of the people in this room have  
7 been in the same position. I think we're all kind  
8 of stuck in terms of what resources are available,  
9 and we're all trying very hard to address it. So  
10 I'm happy, as always, to meet with folks. I know  
11 that my bosses have been meeting and expressing the  
12 concerns, and I don't in any way mean to imply that  
13 that's an issue.

14 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: Two hospitals,  
15 Christ and Hoboken, have been taken over by Hudson  
16 Regional. And during one of the meetings, I brought  
17 that up, that for this County to accept them as the  
18 operators, that we need a special area for those  
19 that have both physical needs from the hospital and  
20 also those that have mental needs. So hopefully  
21 that's a step when they finally get to do these new  
22 hospitals that we will be brought in to State our  
23 case so there is a connection.

24 MS. ALBERT: One of the interim steps  
25 we've taken is using a program in Essex County

1 called Silver Lake Falls Hospital, which provides  
2 both for people who have mental health and substance  
3 abuse needs at the same time, and it's a voluntary  
4 hospitalization. One of the big issues I think  
5 we're having is that the hospitals will only take  
6 our mentally ill folks if they are deemed a danger  
7 to self or others, and they're deemed safe when  
8 they're just potentially hurting the corrections  
9 staff as opposed to everybody else.

10 So that's a real barrier that we're  
11 having, and Silver Lake Falls into the middle there  
12 because folks can go there voluntarily. So I  
13 started to take some of those folks out of the  
14 system, but you know, Director Mazza and I have  
15 discussed how we might integrate them more into the  
16 process. Everything that we can do to do that takes  
17 away from folks who are really getting hurt in the  
18 jail.

19 So I ask for your assistance, and I'd be  
20 happy, and I know the other staff at the Office of  
21 the Public Defender would be happy to discuss any of  
22 these matters. I know that there was a consultant  
23 hired to work on the RFP.

24 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: Dave, can help you  
25 with that.

1                   COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: Mr. Chairman,  
2 we've been discussing over the last couple of  
3 months, I think really through the initiative of  
4 Commissioner O'Dea, the establishment of a mental  
5 health court. How would that intersect? If the  
6 mental health court is involved, that seems to me to  
7 be --

8                   MS. ALBERT: That would be a great.

9                   COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: The mental  
10 health court, if it's a court, if it's an adjunct or  
11 it's a division of the Superior Court of New Jersey,  
12 that's a state-funded court predominantly?

13                  MS. ALEXANDER: Yes.

14                  COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: But how does  
15 that intersect with the contract that you're talking  
16 about with the County now? Obviously, in order to  
17 implement, I would think, in order to implement a  
18 successful mental health court program, there would  
19 have to be a nexus between the medical providers,  
20 the mental health providers, and the judicial  
21 system. I'm just curious, how do you foresee that  
22 as intersecting, those two things?

23                  MR. ANTUN: Mr. Chairman.

24                  CHAIRMAN ROMANO: Go ahead.

25                  COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: Of course.

1 MR. ANTUN: Mr. Chairman, the way  
2 it's been set up is that the County, through our  
3 provider, would do the mental health assessment.  
4 And then that mental health assessment would be  
5 reviewed by the public defender, the prosecutor, and  
6 the courts. And if a determination is made that  
7 this person should not be incarcerated, and they're  
8 willing --

9 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: Should be  
10 diverted to the mental health court.

11 MR. ANTUN: Exactly. And we have a  
12 network of providers that we can send them to.

13 MS. ALEXANDER: Right.

14 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: Well, does  
15 that partially answer the problem? But the hell is  
16 in the details, is it?

17 MS. ALBERT: Right. And part of the  
18 problem is what we're envisioning, because Adam and  
19 I have been working on this in the background, from  
20 both the prosecutors and public defenders' side, is  
21 that program is envisioned as small. You know, at  
22 first we're talking about 10 or 15 or 20 defendants.  
23 My caseload is currently 155, and those are people  
24 with serious mental illness, and I'm not the only  
25 one in the public defender's office who has folks

1 with serious mental illness on staff -- in their  
2 caseload. So we estimate that it's somewhere around  
3 500 or 600 people that we're talking about.

4 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: Out of the  
5 present population of the correctional facility?

6 MS. ALBERT: Not everyone is in the  
7 correctional facility at the same time, so no. But  
8 we're talking about on an annual basis. So it's a  
9 substantial number of people, and some of the  
10 diagnoses are not the kinds of things that  
11 necessarily would lend themselves to a mental health  
12 course because they're, frankly, too severe, or the  
13 offenses may be too severe. So some of these folks,  
14 I think, would be in that situation.

15 The other thing is that a number of the  
16 folks that we work with are not competent to stand  
17 trial. And so those people are not in a mental  
18 health court. They're not well enough.

19 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: They're  
20 outliers, and they're going to go into a different  
21 pool of defendants.

22 MS. ALBERT: Right. And so those are  
23 the folks who we're trying to get to Anne Klein  
24 Forensic Center and to Trenton Hospital. But the  
25 wait list, right now I have someone who's been

1 waiting since October and has gotten four new cases  
2 in the jail in the meantime. And so my concern is  
3 just that we have an interim space for people who  
4 cannot be on the street that is safe. In Essex,  
5 that's the Essex Hospital. In Bergen, they have a  
6 facility as well, Bergen Pines. Yeah, Bergen Pines.

7 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: If I may, we're  
8 drifting off a little bit. We'll come again  
9 tomorrow to talk about it. I think we have to get  
10 back on the budget track.

11 MS. ALBERT: Yes.

12 COMMISSIONER O'DEA: All I would say  
13 is that we should meet on it. We have an RFP out.  
14 Obviously, once that RFP comes in and it's approved,  
15 what services are outlined in it is what we have to  
16 live with.

17 MS. ALBERT: Right.

18 COMMISSIONER O'DEA: So if there's a  
19 need, and it appears that there certainly may be a  
20 need for something that's not currently anticipated  
21 in the RFP, we need to address it sooner rather than  
22 later. The worst thing I would want is to have an  
23 RFP out, have an RFP awarded, leave out what was  
24 articulated today by Amy that other counties have,  
25 which we don't have, and which to the best of my

1 knowledge may not be or is not in the RFP. I don't  
2 know that as a fact. But if that occurs and we  
3 award that, being now put on notice, and then, God  
4 forbid, there are additional issues such as suicides  
5 at the facility, we may put ourselves in a larger  
6 risk of liability.

7 So I would urge that we have that  
8 discussion. If the RFPs are not back, we consider  
9 an addendum to the RFP that would maybe address  
10 this. And I would assume the way that other  
11 facilities, based on the medical coverage that an  
12 individual has, especially if they qualify for  
13 Medicaid, then there would be a revenue from if it  
14 was, and I'm using Meadowview as the example, if  
15 that was the case. Yes, Mr. Administrator.

16 MR. ANTUN: Mr. Chairman, we've  
17 already issued the RFP and we received responses,  
18 but we haven't acted on them. So but that doesn't  
19 mean we can't review what you just said and reject  
20 the proposals and if necessary and do it again,  
21 because I don't -- what you -- what has just been  
22 raised. I don't know if that's in there, but  
23 we'll -- we'll certainly take a look at it and we'll  
24 let you know.

25 COMMISSIONER O'DEA: Good. Okay.

1 MR. ANTUN: But I just want to let  
2 you know that we did get two responses from the RFP.

3 COMMISSIONER O'DEA: We'll keep you  
4 definitely updated.

5 MS. ALBERT: I appreciate that.

6 COMMISSIONER O'DEA: And just from my  
7 perspective, if -- if that issue is not addressed  
8 and within what presenters, I'd have difficulty  
9 voting for either contract.

10 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: And one last  
11 thing, and I know we want to move on with the budget  
12 hearing, but another complication, perhaps, is as,  
13 as someone calls it, the Big Beautiful Bill will  
14 have -- will have consequences for Medicaid. And I  
15 don't know the nuts and bolts of the Big Beautiful  
16 Bill, whether that's going to impact on this kind of  
17 a program.

18 COMMISSIONER O'DEA: That affects a  
19 lot more.

20 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: Okay. Continue,  
21 Mr. Clerk.

22 THE CLERK: Any further speakers?  
23 Motion to close.

24 COMMISSIONER WALKER: Motion.

25 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: Motion to close by

1 Walker and Carrie.

2 THE CLERK: All in favor.

3 (Unanimous Aye.)

4 THE CLERK: Commissioner

5 Aponte-Lipski.

6 COMMISSIONER APONTE-LIPSKI: Aye.

7 THE CLERK: Commissioner Baselice.

8 COMMISSIONER BASELICE: Yes.

9 THE CLERK: Commissioner Cedeño.

10 COMMISSIONER CEDEÑO: Yes.

11 THE CLERK: Commissioner Cifelli.

12 COMMISSIONER CIFELLI: Just to echo

13 Commissioner Baselice's comments, we represent  
14 Secaucus obviously and they've been inordinately hit  
15 with the consequences of this budget. However, as we  
16 discussed with Mayor Gonnelli, that's I believe more  
17 of a product of the state equalization formula.

18 I think he understands that to his credit,  
19 but I think Commissioner Baselice will be happy to  
20 follow up tomorrow at a walk-on resolution to urge  
21 our County legislatures and the State Governor's  
22 office to try to ride to the rescue, so to speak,  
23 and try to find some State aid to offset the  
24 deleterious effect that this budget is going to have  
25 on that one municipality. So I would vote aye.

1 Yes.

2 THE CLERK: Commissioner Kopacz.

3 COMMISSIONER KOPACZ: Yes.

4 THE CLERK: Commissioner O'Dea.

5 COMMISSIONER O'DEA: So I don't think  
6 this is necessarily a bad budget. I don't see a lot  
7 of fat and waste in it. Going over the hearings,  
8 certainly there's probably, as in any budget, a  
9 couple million dollars that could have been proposed  
10 to be cut, but when there are other issues that are  
11 outstanding that those dollars may be needed for, I  
12 came to the conclusion that that may not have been  
13 the most prudent thing to do. But based on the  
14 impact that it has on Jersey City this year, I vote  
15 no.

16 THE CLERK: Commissioner Rodriguez.

17 COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ: Yes.

18 THE CLERK: Commissioner Walker.

19 COMMISSIONER WALKER: Yes.

20 THE CLERK: Chairman Romano.

21 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: Yes. But I have to  
22 make a comment. I want to personally, on behalf of  
23 my colleagues, thank the directors, their deputy  
24 directors, their staffs, and the County Exec's  
25 office to come up with a budget that obviously is

1 trying to serve all our constituents in the best way  
2 possible, understanding the pain of Secaucus. I  
3 understand it personally because a few years ago, I  
4 was 20-something percent or whatever it was. But  
5 again, our sincere thanks and gratitude for all the  
6 hard work that you do to put a budget together,  
7 representing two of the cities, Jersey City, and  
8 also that gets hit with different budget increases.

9 But the State formula hopefully someday  
10 will be adjusted to the reality of what goes on in  
11 this County. And to also Abe and your staff and  
12 everyone involved, thank you. I vote yes.

13 THE CLERK: Mr. Chairman, I have no  
14 further business. Motion to adjourn?

15 COMMISSIONER KOPACZ: Motion.

16 CHAIRMAN ROMANO: Kopacz and Yraida  
17 Lipski.

18 THE CLERK: All in favor? We are  
19 adjourned.

20 (Whereupon the proceeding is then  
21 concluded at 6:13 p.m.)  
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C E R T I F I C A T I O N

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I, SHARI CATHEY, CCR, RPR, License No. 30XI00234700, and Notary Public of the State of New Jersey, hereby certify that the proceedings herein are from the notes taken by me of a Budget Hearing of the Hudson County Board of County Commissioners, held on Wednesday, June 11, 2025; and that this is a correct transcript of the same.



SHARI CATHEY, CCR, RPR  
A NOTARY PUBLIC of the  
State of New Jersey  
I.D. No. 2283786  
Commission Expires 2/4/27

<b>1</b>	<b>208,406,358....</b> 18:24 <b>2283786</b> 38:14 <b>24</b> 5:18,22 <b>25</b> 14:6	<b>6</b>	<b>accepted</b> 3:22 <b>access</b> 25:7 <b>accomplished</b> 6:6 <b>acted</b> 33:18 <b>actual</b> 11:25 <b>actually</b> 24:13 24:21 26:21 <b>adam</b> 30:18 <b>add</b> 14:17 <b>addendum</b> 33:9 <b>additional</b> 33:4 <b>address</b> 27:9 32:21 33:9 <b>addressed</b> 34:7 <b>adequate</b> 15:20 <b>adjourn</b> 37:14 <b>adjourned</b> 37:19 <b>adjunct</b> 29:10 <b>adjust</b> 20:6 <b>adjusted</b> 37:10 <b>adjustment</b> 20:5 <b>administration</b> 1:7,20,22 <b>administrator</b> 1:23 33:15 <b>adopt</b> 8:23 <b>adopted</b> 9:4,9,9 10:3 18:16 <b>adoption</b> 16:9 16:13,17
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