



February 28, 2019

ERIE COUNTY LEGISLATURE

HON. LYNNE DIXON

LEGISLATOR
DISTRICT 9

Hon. John Bruso
Erie County Legislature
92 Franklin Street – 4th Floor
Buffalo, New York 14202

Dear Legislator Bruso,

As you are probably aware, a troubling story has been made public regarding an employee of the Erie County Health Department who has been accused of falsifying health inspection reports. Thankfully, it seems that the residents got lucky and no one was sickened by food at any of the establishments whose reports were allegedly falsified.

This issue is far more substantial than just an employee failing to do his or her job. The Department has admittedly not performed any supervision on any of their inspectors in the past. Even simple practices like random follow-up calls to restaurants after purported inspection dates have not been completed. The reason given is that we haven't had any foodborne outbreaks from unsafe food practices. However, over the past few years I can recall almost a half dozen instances where communicable diseases were discovered at area establishments, which could have sparked a much wider health issue. In 2018 an E. Coli outbreak linked to tainted romaine lettuce claimed several lives, it is the safe food practices, enforced by the Health Department, that are often the last line of defense.

The Health and Human Services Committee should convene at the next possible opportunity to have a discussion with the Health Department regarding the process for reporting health inspections, how this individual was able to fake his reports, what the Health Department is doing to prevent this from happening again, and whether this is a problem we should be concerned about as being widespread. I would also ask that the County Attorney's office be present to discuss the legal ramifications the county could face or the legal remedies the county will pursue.

While I am glad these instances did not lead to tragedy, the residents of Erie County should not have to rely on luck. We have to be better and we have to take this occurrence seriously. The CDC estimates over 3,000 people die each year from food borne illnesses alone.

I appreciate your attention in this matter and I look forward to having the conversation in committee.

Sincerely,

Lynne M. Dixon
Erie County Legislator