

June 23, 2021

STATEMENT FROM SHERIFF ROBERT L. LANGLEY JR.

On June 3, 2021, Legislator Ginny Nacerino, Chairwoman of the Protective Services Committee, sent a memo to Robert L. Langley, Jr. asking him to “participate by audio webinar in the meeting of the Protective Services Committee on June 17, 2021, to discuss the matter” regarding the return of two “marine patrol” boats to the New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. However, instead of a discussion, the Protective Services meeting was more akin to a lecture, with Legislators Nacerino and Sullivan taking the opportunity to once again attack the Sheriff’s Department which has come to be their practice. Specifically, Chairwoman Nacerino accused the Sheriff’s Office of not acting in good faith by putting vessels on “both the Hudson and Lake Mahopac” and “blatantly” defying Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell and the Putnam County Legislature. Additionally, Legislator Neal Sullivan accused the Sheriff of being “unprofessional” and disregarding the intent of the legislature.

By way of background, last year the County Executive, with the approval of the Legislature, cut the Marine Patrol Unit budget by \$45,000. Then on May 12, 2021, the County Executive notified the Director of the Marine Services Bureau of the NYS Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, that, in her capacity as County Executive, she was providing notice of termination of agreements which would allow the Sheriff’s department’s Marine Unit to utilize, at no cost to Putnam County, 2 boats owned by NYS. She did so without the common courtesy of discussing the matter with the Sheriff. The vessels that Odell is referring to are a 2008 Pro-Line that is typically deployed to the Hudson River in the Village of Cold Spring and a 2012 Boston Whaler which was to be deployed to Lake Oscawana this season.

At no time, this season, did the Sheriff’s Office dock a vessel on Lake Mahopac. Furthermore, docking a State-owned vessel in the Hudson River was done in case it was needed for emergency response only. The vessel was docked in the Hudson River because the Sheriff’s Department not only has the jurisdictional authority but the obligation to provide emergency and law enforcement services throughout all of Putnam County. This includes the waterways within County lines when needed. The Cold Spring and Garrison Fire Departments have small vessels available for emergency response, however the Sheriff’s Department is the primary agency for law enforcement of the waters on the Hudson within the borders of Putnam County. The volunteer fire departments have no police authority and in fact cannot conduct police investigations into boating accidents, drownings, criminal activity, or other incidents requiring the same. Nor can they conduct safety checks of boaters on the river. The fire departments are a tremendous asset when needed to respond to emergencies if available but provide no proactive services. They are reactionary at most.

The Carmel Police Department does provide emergency and law enforcement services on Lake Mahopac. However, they have an ailing boat that has already broken down several times in this young boating season. They depend on the Sheriff's Office for mutual aid and shared services when unavailable due to mechanical issues or staff shortages. For these reasons, the return of two State owned vessels absolutely has an effect on public safety on the waterways of Putnam County.

The Marine Patrol Unit was established on the Hudson River and Lake Oscawana in 1998 by then Sheriff Robert D. Thoubboron to patrol these bodies of water in Putnam County. The Hudson River shorelines have always been a part of Putnam County since its birth in 1812. The New York State Park's Department provides the boats that the Sheriff's Office use at no cost to the County with the stipulation that we patrol the Hudson Valley waterway. Although the Marine Unit is and has always been funded by overtime, NYS reimburses the County 50% of the overtime costs required to provide public safety on the Putnam County waterways.

The Marine Patrol Unit continued to operate on overtime throughout the entire administration of Sheriff Donald B. Smith for 16 years, unchallenged by County officials. Although other agencies may have marine units, they are not dedicated to Putnam County and there is no overlap of services. The mere presence of the Marine Patrol in these waters is critical in ensuring that boaters operate their boats safely and legally.

Without the Sheriff Department's Marine Patrol Vessels what police agency will respond to emergency calls on the Hudson River in Putnam County?

This said, there are other comments in the June 17th Protective Services Committee meeting that were disturbing. Legislator Sullivan's statement that the County needs to cut the Sheriff's Office budget to better fund needed mental health and drug treatment services is the exact definition of defunding the police. Sheriff Langley recognizes the need for increased services; however, these services should be provided by the State and County. Reducing the Sheriff's Department budget at the expense of public safety is not the correct mechanism to address these social issues.

Legislator Sullivan further stated that the County needs to cut redundant services such as the Marine Patrol and "SWAT". SWAT is a reference to the multijurisdictional Emergency Response Team ("ERT") comprised of members of the Sheriff's Office, Carmel PD and Kent PD. Why did he reference this and what is he thinking? Who does he think will respond to barricaded subjects, hostage situations, mass shootings and other incidents requiring ERT interventions where there is a serious, legitimate risk to public and officer safety? One can only ask that if Marine Unit services were reduced without discussion with the Sheriff's Office or public input, is eliminating funding for ERT next?

As previously mentioned, budget cuts to the Marine Patrol by the County Administration occurred without any prior dialogue with the Sheriff. This cut was made unilaterally. The Sheriff's Office did bring our concerns to the Legislature at last October's budget meeting

without any constructive dialogue. In fact, the June 17th Protective Services Committee meeting was just another example of the treatment that the Sheriff's Department constantly receives at these meetings. Legislators Nacerino and Sullivan, as usual, read their several pages of prepared statements attacking the Sheriff and members of the Sheriff's Office in their always condescending tones. The Sheriff's Office was invited to the meeting for a discussion; however, when Captain Tompkins was directly responding to the statements made by the legislators, he was rudely interrupted by Legislator Sullivan, berated by Chairwoman Nacerino and not allowed to finish his statement. Nor was any other member of the Sheriff's department or the public given the opportunity to speak on the issues.

One only has to listen to the audio tapes of the meeting to see their lack of respect and their treatment of this Office. They certainly do not treat other county departments in the same manner. They become indigent whenever we respond to them or challenge them. And yes, when we say NYS Parks was "bullied" into taking the state vessels back just read the multiple correspondences from the County to the NYS Parks Department demanding they take the State vessels back.

The Protective Services Committee meetings cannot continue in this manner. If Legislators Sullivan and Nacerino are going to spend a half an hour attacking the Sheriff's Department in a public forum over something as trivial as docking a vessel in the Hudson River for emergency response without even contacting this office for an explanation, then future meetings will remain counterproductive.