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Ulster County Social Services boss says he opposes deputies checking visitors to his department for warrants

Social Services commissioner opposes sheriff's new policy

By Patricia Doxsey, Daily Freeman

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KINGSTON >> The commissioner of the Ulster County Department of Social Services has added his voice to the growing chorus calling for an end to sheriff's deputies conducting warrant checks at the department's office.

Deputy County Executive Ken Crannell said Commissioner Mike Ipoce has asked Sheriff Paul Van Blarcum to stop conducting the checks pending a review and discussion by county legislators.

The sheriff declined the request, Crannell said.

Van Blarcum did not return a reporter's call Thursday.

County Legislature Chairman John Parete said legislative leaders discussed the situation with the executive branch during a leadership meeting Thursday but are waiting for a legal opinion before deciding whether to take up the matter.

"Right now, we're waiting for the attorneys to do more research," said Parete, D-Boiceville.

"The question is, can we make a policy as owners of the building? Can we tell law-enforcement people how to do their jobs?" he said.

In early October, Van Blarcum implemented new procedures that requires everyone who enters the town of Ulster building that houses the county Department of Social Services and Office for the Aging to present identification with a name and date of birth at the security checkpoint. Sheriff's deputies, who provide security coverage at the site, enter that information into the New York Statewide Police Information Network, which informs deputies whether the person has any outstanding warrants.

Van Blarcum said the procedures also are in place in the Ulster County Jail and the county Probation Department.

The move has outraged some legislators, who believe the practice violates people's civil rights.

"You should be able to walk in and seek help from a government office without having a deputy standing there going over your background with no cause," said Legislator Jeanette Provenzano, D-Kingston. "I personally would be very offended by it, and I don't think it's right."

The New York Civil Liberties Union and National Center for Law and Economic Justice also have called on Van Blarcum to stop running the warrant checks, calling the practice “misguided and unlawful” and saying it violates Fourth Amendment protections against unreasonable search and seizure, is discriminatory and could have a chilling effect on those seeking to access state and federal programs.

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