

Another Voice / *Public health*

Burstein deserves compensation for her tireless efforts

BY AIMANA ELBAHTITY

Physicians from the Medical Society of Erie County feel that it is truly disappointing to see the Buffalo News editorial printed Feb. 2 that asserted that Erie County Health Commissioner Dr. Gale Burstein's tireless efforts to protect the health and welfare of the residents of Erie County is not good value for Erie County residents.

Erie County physicians were especially disappointed to see that the editorial failed to recognize a key point of the Erie County comptroller's report that documented Burstein working 1,266 hours of overtime since March 15, 2020.

Doing the math, Burstein worked an average of 30 additional hours per

week for a total of 70 hours per week, every week, from March 15 to Dec. 31, leading the Department of Health's Covid-19 public health response, plus overseeing usual Health Department operations. In addition, Burstein is in fact an hourly employee whose pay is tied to the number of hours she works per week, rather than a salaried employee not entitled to overtime compensation.

To every physician who currently works with Burstein, it is apparent from her around-the-clock responsiveness that she continues to work all day and literally through the night, responding to urgent requests for information as our county struggles to access a vaccine to address this pandemic. All the while, Burstein must re-

sume ongoing operations by continuing to provide up-to-date surveillance data, prepare for and attend regularly scheduled press conferences.

Burstein continues to supervise Erie County Covid-19 contact tracing, performed seven days a week, including all weekends and holidays, to contain the spread of the outbreak and bring the infection numbers to a decline. Burstein continues to oversee a strong enforcement program to keep Erie County residents safe by responding to complaints of unsafe practices and enforcing state rules and regulations related to Covid-19 and testing operations expansion at the Erie County Public Health Laboratory.

Despite these great efforts in response to this unparalleled trial.

Burstein must continue to supervise the Health Department's ongoing and essential core public health operations, including overdose prevention initiatives, rabies control, routine restaurant inspections, beach water testing, and community health education activities.

To think that our health commissioner is now confronted with this flawed attack related to a perceived monetary worth for her tireless efforts is truly inconceivable. The Medical Society and physicians of Erie County will continue to stand strong and proud alongside the endless efforts of our health commissioner during these unprecedented times.

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