



County of Lackawanna

Lackawanna County
Government Center
123 Wyoming Ave
Scranton, Pennsylvania
18503

Meeting Minutes

Board of Commissioners

Wednesday, December 3, 2025

10:00 AM

Commissioners' Conference Room

Call to Order

This meeting was called to order at 10:02am.

Leading our pledge of allegiance today is Tim Booth. Tim serves as our Lackawanna County Director of Veterans Affairs. He's also a member of the Abington Memorial VFW 7069 and a member of the 109th Infantry Association. Tim served in the Pennsylvania Army National Guard for 22 years from 1985 to 2006. Joined as a private commission to officer candidate school and retired as a major in the National Guard. He had two deployments, one Europe 2002 and 2003 and Iraq 2005 to 2006. Tim currently lives in South Abington Township.

Present 3 - Chris Chermak, Bill Gaughan and Thom Welby

Reading and Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Commissioner Thom Welby, seconded by Commissioner Bill Gaughan, that this be Dispense with the Reading and Approve as Prepared. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Commissioner Chris Chermak, Commissioner Bill Gaughan and Thom Welby

Opportunity for the Public to Address the Board (Agenda Items Only)

Joan Hodowanitz, Scranton: With regard to the second reading of the budget, before I arrived here, I was up at the library checking out the county website and I noticed that did did the board ever put out a 2026 budget message like you've done in prior years? And also noticed that we still have on the county's website the preliminary budget dated October 15th. Assuming you passed the budget today with the second reading, are you going to then post a final version of it? Because page two needs to change the millage rates. And have you any idea when uh we will the public will have access to the 2026 digital budget book? That's a very helpful asset to the general public for drilling down into various departments and certain issues.

Commissioner Chris Chermak: We are working on the digital budget book and hope to have it to the public as soon as we can.

Walter Griffith: I'm the Luzerne County Controller. I'm here to address the commissioners regarding the agenda item, which is the law enforcement officer program. As most of the commissioners know who have been on the airport board, I've been very vocal regarding this law enforcement officer program. as the controller as well as a member of county council back in 2021. In fact, in 2021, in September 2021, I sent a letter to the at to the airport board asking for an investigation into this matter, and it was turned over by your solicitor, which is Donnie Frederickson, to the attorney general's office, and I've heard nothing since then. That was back in September of 2021. I have the

letter here for the record if you need it that I asked for an investigation as to how this LEO officer program started in the first place. I never received a response. Now, we're going to fast forward to 2025 and every year thereafter, I've been at airport board meetings complaining about this program. The biggest complaint I have is there's no transparency. We met behind closed doors. I've been at every airport meeting. I've never heard about this LEO officer agreement that's on your agenda today. Not once. Not once have I heard the details. Not once as the controller of county have we addressed anything about cost. The agreement says there's going to be a cost that the county of Luzerne will pay 25%. Lackawanna will pay 25%. Of what? There's nothing in the agreement that says what's that cost? Is it \$50 an hour? Are we paying benefits? Are we paying retirement? What are we paying for? There's nothing in the agreement. Nothing. But it was all done behind closed doors. Commissioner Chermak was there. He's the only one that was in closed door sessions. He knows all the answers to these questions. Yet we can't get answers to it. I asked these questions and county at the at our meeting. We can't get answers. Why the big secret? Why the big secret? Big secret is because we're trying to funnel money to people for doing something that they're not required to do. I'm a Republican. I'll put that right out on the table. I am not a Bill Gaughan fan at all. He's a Democrat. I am not. But I will say that when somebody is right, they're right. This program should not be in place. Now, there's been statements made by the commissioners and by county manager saying, "We're trying to defund airport security." No, we're not. We have security there. The airport themselves said they don't need it. Why are we doing this? Why are we putting this burden on the taxpayers of the county, but the biggest issue that I have is a transparency issue. And the problem I have as a Republican is that Republicans are supposed to be conservative. Republicans are supposed to stand for what's right or wrong. Republicans are supposed to make sure that these type of deals don't work behind the scenes. And we have a Republican on this commissioner body that sat in every one of those meetings and has yet to divulge what happened in any of them yet voted for the agreement. I don't know how Mr. Welby can vote on this agreement. He hasn't been at anything. There's never been anything divulged. In my last couple of minutes, I have a couple of questions that I wish the commissioners would write down and answer specifically Mr. Chermak because he's the only one that could answer them because the agreement says it's a two-year agreement, but there's also a clause and says it automatically renews forever. Forever. Think about that, taxpayers. Forever. Every two years. At the end of two years, if nobody objects to this agreement, it automatically renews forever. Now, we don't know who's going to live forever here, but I'm going to tell you,

two years from now, people won't even be thinking about this LEO. and it's going to be a big burden on the county taxpayers. So the first question I have is how many police officers will be on site 7 days a week 365 5 to 7. Second question what is the cost of the officers? The third question is will the DA from each county supply any less to the airport and what is the cost? Obviously, it's going to be Mr. Gallagher and Mr. Sanguedolce. Who will be responsible for payment of the officers Luzerne or Lackawanna County? And who will be providing the reimbursements? If this is a two-year agreement, then why is there a renew clause that states it never ends? These are questions that we should be answering. Why wasn't up not why was it not on the work session agenda? Why was it conveniently not put there? But now it's on this agenda. Something smells here. And I'm going to tell you, it doesn't smell good. And if these commissioners are smart in this township or in this county, you won't

vote for this LEO agreement until you get some of these questions answered and answered correctly in in the light of day for the public to see. Sunshine is the best disinfectant. Thank you.

Commissioner Chermak asks Don Frederickson to join in.

General Counsel Don Frederickson: Commissioners, what I would say is the LEO program has been in place probably about 10 years or so up at the airport. Prior it had been paid for through a grant that the federal government had funded. However, that grant went away two years ago and Luzerne County district attorney runs the program through their office because the airport the building the terminal is located in Luzerne County. So, you have to have law enforcement from that county or deputized to that county to do that. The cost is approximately \$150,000 a year. The agreement is going to be the airport is going to pay half of that and then the two counties are going to split the other half 25 and 25% each. It was discussed at the airport board meeting. Luzerne County has already passed it. They passed it at their meeting last week so at a public meeting and we're going to pass it today at a public meeting. We're talking about security and at the airport and you know a lot of the details really aren't subject to right to know or disclosure because it could affect the security at the airport.

Commissioner Chris Chermak: I don't like accusations of doing things behind closed doors. But you know we had district attorneys there which you know we're following the guidance of both district attorneys from Luzerne and Lackawanna County. you know, as a, you know, I've been on that board for going a little over six years now or six years. Uh, I've been a pilot for nearly four decades. I know how airports run. I've been in and out of many airports. Um, the way things are today with violence and you just never know. So, is there is there ever enough security? I know we have we have we have paid security officers. They're not they don't have arresting powers.

General Counsel Don Frederickson: Correct. And that's the biggest reason to have law enforcement there is our we do have armed security on site 24 hours a day. However, if there is an incident, they don't have arrest powers. They can detain and hold. And the purpose of having a LEO, a law enforcement officer there is they can actually make an arrest on site.

Commissioner Chris Chermak: The problem is if there's a situation um you know the response time and that was DA Sanguedolce's biggest concern is response time and things like that. So, it's been it's been discussed. It's been you know the there are two top law enforcement officers. I'm going to kind of go with what they're recommending. It's a small price to pay for Lackawanna County. I think the number is \$36,000.

General Counsel Don Frederickson: I'd like to point out, commissioner, also is that District Attorney Sanguedolce's and District Attorney Gallagher have met and they're they've have some agreement that they're going to figure out about law enforcement from Lackawanna County also serving at the airport.

Commissioner Chris Chermak: Yeah, they're going to work together to come up with a schedule for the men or men and women, whoever is going to be. They're going to work alongside our security director at the airport. To me, it sounds like a very simple operation. They all know what they're doing. And again, I, you know, I'm only going by the recommendations of both top law enforcement officers or both Brian Gallagher and Sanguedolce. So, you know, I, as far as I'm concerned, I don't think there was anything underhanded or we discussed these things at meetings along with the district attorneys. It's a small price to pay for safety and security. I mean, I travel in and out of that airport. I'm sure many people from Lackawanna County do and would appreciate that. Matter of fact, when I flew out over the holiday, I was talking to

one of our LEOs at the desk so I believe he might even been a retired state trooper. I'm not sure what he did, but it doesn't matter.

General Counsel Don Frederickson: And how the program works is we reimburse Luzerne County for what they pay. The district attorney's office pays to have them there. There are no benefits, there are no uh pension, there's nothing like that from us. Now, what they get through the DA's office, I don't know what that how that works.

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: Can I just add two things to this issue? I just want to thank the controller from Luzerne County for coming up to speak and I'll get into more detail on this at uh towards the end of the business part of the meeting when this is up for a vote. But I think what Mr. Griffith was referring to was there was a question at the airport meeting on whether or not the executive sessions were being held properly. He had raised the issue a reporter from the times leader had raised the issue and I had raised the issue at a previous airport board meeting. Usually executive sessions are supposed to be held to discuss personnel matters and other things. Otherwise you would have a public caucus or a public work session or something like that. So I think that's what Mr. Griffith was objecting to and others had objected to. And what we did ask for was, I made a motion at the airport meeting to ask our solicitors to write a memo to the board just solidifying that it is in fact legal to have these executive sessions. He did not receive that yet. So that's the first point. The second point is what Mr. Griffith is also objecting to is the same thing I objected to. And I know he said he's not a huge Bill Gone fan, but I'm a fan of his for standing up and saying what he thinks is right. What we were simply saying is when this came to light, when Luzerne County had asked Lackawanna County to chip in for the program, the three top officials at the airport, the airport director, the deputy director, and the director of public safety, who by the way is a former air marshal, all said, "We don't need this LEO program." And I that I have the minutes from the airport board meeting when I asked them directly and specifically, do we need this program? I got three no's from the airport director, the deputy director, and the director of public safety, former air marshal. And the reason they said that we don't need the program is because we pay, the airport pays \$500,000 a year for an armed security force. The TSA is armed. Commissioner Tack is correct. They don't have arrest powers, but they will call the police and the police respond very quickly. That's the way it's always worked at the airport and that's what we were objecting to is that when you have three of the top airport officials telling you, "Hey, this program is no longer funded by the federal government. We looked into it. We did an analysis and we don't we're not recommending you move forward with this." That's what I think Walter was basing his comments on and I'll be basing my no vote on this later on in the meeting. The other thing I believe he's referring to is that the legislation seems open-ended in the area of exactly what we're going to pay. I think that I'm going to vote against this, but I do think that that should be delineated in the agreement because it does seem open-ended to me. But and I'll reserve the rest of my comments for the actual legislation when it comes up.

Ordinances - Second Reading

[25-0293](#)

Ordinance 301

Second Reading

Annual Budget for the County of Lackawanna for the year 2026

Attachments: [Ord 301.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Commissioner Thom Welby, seconded by Commissioner Bill Gaughan, that this Ordinance be Tabled. The motion carried by the following vote:

CFO Dave Bulzoni: The deferred approval would enable the revenue and finance department to quantify the cost of the electricity contract for the 2026 budget year. Our existing contracts with Constellation Energy have started to expire in November and will continue to expire in December. We have 37 accounts with the energy supplier. We're evaluating two proposals that were received following a request for proposal process in conjunction with the prospective electricity savings that we're going to realize from the completion of the energy savings project. We expect to have that information compiled prior to the next work session. Most of which we've assembled now. So with the proposals that we received, as everyone in this room is aware, your electricity costs are going up. They're going to continue to go up. The proposals that we received, the lowest cost proposal represented a 42% increase in electricity cost, which doesn't come as any surprise to me, or should it come as any surprise to anyone in the room. as was pointed out by the chief of staff, it doesn't affect the millage. We're not looking at an increase in millage to cover that cost. With the first several runs of the budget, we had some surplus that was realized once we had compared both revenues and expenses in the prospective 2026 budget. it would probably deplete that to some extent, but we really want to try and quantify it much more closely so we know what that number is. So, it's my recommendation that we defer the approval until we have uh a number that's more exact that we can plug into the budget.

Commissioner Chris Chermak: Plus, you're waiting on I think you stated that you're waiting on the for the ESCO project the amount of savings that we could recognize as well, right?

CFO Dave Bulzoni: Correct. and typically after an ESCO project there's a meeting in which they're going to go over individually the prospective savings in a number of areas. I just ask them to provide me with a pretty accurate estimate in advance of that meeting because we just don't have the time. The other part of it too is with the existing contract with Constellation, it does allow for renewals of that contract. So we were working with Constellation as well to get a cost. So, if they were going to extend the contract, what is it going to cost based on a comparison between the two proposals that we received in the request for proposal process? Constellation did not submit a proposal, but again, they have an existing contract which has a clause for a renewal if we desired to do so. So, we're really comparing costs between the two proposals we received in the request for proposal process and also the cost that constellation is providing and then adding into that or I should say subtracting from that the estimated savings we'd receive from the completion of the energy savings project.

Commissioner Thom Welby: Well, I do appreciate the delay. While I was sworn in last Tuesday afternoon, we started our work sessions. I was working with Commissioner Gaughan, Commissioner Chermak, and Mr. Bulzoni and Chief of Staff Jeffers on and some department heads already on the budget.

Unfortunately, we haven't gone through every department yet. And we did have a little bit of a short week last week and I appreciate a little bit more time. I'd like to before voting on the budget, I'd appreciate the time to look into the budget a little deeper than I have been able to and that's appreciated as well.

General Counsel Don Frederickson: And commissioner, I would just add that under the charter, we have until January the 1st to adopt the budget without

having to take any other action about continuing spending resolutions and so forth. So, we're good till January 1st. And additionally, I would just state that you're probably better off delaying it and because otherwise you would have to go and reopen the budget and go through that process.

Aye: 3 - Commissioner Chris Chermak, Commissioner Bill Gaughan and Thom Welby

Resolutions

25-0302

Approving Current Payables

Attachments: [Res 25-0302.pdf](#)
 [3H50MKQH.pdf](#)
 [3H50MKQI.pdf](#)
 [signed Accounts Payables.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Commissioner Thom Welby, seconded by Commissioner Bill Gaughan, that this Resolution be Adopted. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Commissioner Chris Chermak, Commissioner Bill Gaughan and Thom Welby

25-0294

Approving LSA Applications

Attachments: [Legislative Cover Sheet Updated-LSA Statewide 2025-26.docx](#)
 [Res 25-0294.pdf](#)
 [signed LSA Grant Applications.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Commissioner Thom Welby, seconded by Commissioner Bill Gaughan, that this Resolution be Adopted. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Commissioner Chris Chermak, Commissioner Bill Gaughan and Thom Welby

25-0295

Ratifying CDBG Modifications and Revisions

Attachments: [Legislative Cover Sheet CDBG.docx](#)
 [Res 25-0295.pdf](#)
 [signed CDBG Modifications.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Commissioner Thom Welby, seconded by Commissioner Bill Gaughan, that this Resolution be Adopted. The motion carried by the following vote:

Commissioner Thom Welby: On the question, In in our work session, we discussed this and I was just incredibly disappointed initially at the moving of funds from the first-time home buyers program which I've been a just a huge fan of and in in what that program has enabled so many people to move into to allow them the opportunity to move into their own home is something that

everyone here particularly your commissioners and the staff here is 100% % in support of. But I was reminded and it's something that I needed to be reminded of. There are communities, there are municipalities in our county in which the first-time home buyers program isn't as much in demand as it is in other parts of our county and that these funds that were going to be moved, it was necessary to move them or lose them and that the projects that they were being moved into were critical and I do agree although I do with hesitancy and hopefully in the future with our partners that we work with and that the city works with in the home first-time home buyers program, we can establish the distribution of funds in an area in which they might be more better received and also with our media partners also that they can help us inform the public of these opportunities that are available. So while I do it with hesitance, I am in support of this this move of these funds although it was difficult to read initially. Thank you.

Aye: 3 - Commissioner Chris Chermak, Commissioner Bill Gaughan and Thom Welby

[25-0296](#)

Approving an Adult Probation Grant

Attachments: [FY 2025-26 CCAPPG Funding Announcement.pdf](#)
[Grant 47607 Adult Probation and Parole UNSIGNED application.pdf](#)
[Legislative Cover Sheet for Probation and Parole Grant.docx](#)
[Res 25-0296.pdf](#)
[signed Adult Probation Grant.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Commissioner Thom Welby, seconded by Commissioner Bill Gaughan, that this Resolution be Adopted. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Commissioner Chris Chermak, Commissioner Bill Gaughan and Thom Welby

[25-0297](#)

Approving the IP Grant Submission

Attachments: [IP Grant Legislative Cover Sheet.docx](#)
[FY 2025-26 Intermediate Punishment Funding Announcement.pdf](#)
[IP Grant DRAFT Contract Page.pdf](#)
[Res 25-0297.pdf](#)
[signed IP Grant Adult Probation.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Commissioner Thom Welby, seconded by Commissioner Bill Gaughan, that this Resolution be Adopted. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Commissioner Chris Chermak, Commissioner Bill Gaughan and Thom Welby

[25-0298](#)

Approving the Agreement with Westlaw

Attachments: [Westlaw Renewal Agreement Legislative Cover Sheet .docx](#)
[Westlaw.pdf](#)
[Res 25-0298.pdf](#)
[signed Westlaw Courts Agreement.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Commissioner Thom Welby, seconded by Commissioner Bill Gaughan, that this Resolution be Adopted. The motion carried by the following vote:

General Counsel Don Frederickson: Just to point out, commissioners, that the court administrator's office and the solicitor's office also worked this year to save some money and we canceled the books. We were actually still receiving the hard books that nobody was using. So we we worked together to cancel those.

Court Administrator Frank Castellano: It saved between 16 and \$20,000.

Aye: 3 - Commissioner Chris Chermak, Commissioner Bill Gaughan and Thom Welby

[25-0299](#)

Entering into an Offender Management Agreement

Attachments: [PA Lackawanna County OMS MS Support Agmt Draft \(4\) \(1\).docx](#)
[Res 25-0299.pdf](#)
[signed Prison Offender Management Agreement](#)

A motion was made by Commissioner Thom Welby, seconded by Commissioner Bill Gaughan, that this Resolution be Adopted. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Commissioner Chris Chermak, Commissioner Bill Gaughan and Thom Welby

[25-0300](#)

Entering into an Agreement with Kronos/UKG

Attachments: [Legislative Cover Sheet 11 12 2025 UKG.docx](#)
[UKG--34110-WFD \(003\).pdf](#)
[Lackawanna County Q-374589.pdf](#)
[Res 25-0300.pdf](#)
[signed Kronos UKG Agreement.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Commissioner Thom Welby, seconded by Commissioner Bill Gaughan, that this Resolution be Adopted. The motion carried by the following vote:

Commissioner Chris Chermak: Okay. That's I was just going to say are you I know there's been some discussion whether we going to continue this program and if you're recommending it.

CFO Dave Buzloni: That discussion I think will come at a later date. We did have a fairly healthy discussion regarding the renewal in the work session. I am meeting with someone from UKG which is the parent company of Kronos to discuss options that may be more favorable to the county than the existing system but that discussion will come at a later date and obviously we can

discuss the existing system further.

Aye: 3 - Commissioner Chris Chermak, Commissioner Bill Gaughan and Thom Welby

25-0301

Authorizing the Sale of Tax Liens

Attachments: [Legislative Cover Sheet 11 26 2025 Tax Lien Sale.docx](#)
[Lackawanna County Resolution 2026 Lien .doc](#)
[RES 25-0301.pdf](#)
[signed Tax Lien Sale 2025.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Commissioner Thom Welby, seconded by Commissioner Bill Gaughan, that this Resolution be Adopted. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Commissioner Chris Chermak, Commissioner Bill Gaughan and Thom Welby

25-0303

Entering into an Engagement Letter

Attachments: [Legislative Cover Sheet 11 26 2025 Dehey McAndrew.docx](#)
[Flexible Spending Accounts.pdf](#)
[Lackawanna County - Flexible Spending Accounts - LOE 2026.pdf](#)
[Res 25-0303.pdf](#)
[signed DeHEy Health Benefits Flex Spending.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Commissioner Thom Welby, seconded by Commissioner Chris Chermak, that this Resolution be Adopted. The motion carried by the following vote:

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: On the question, I just have a couple comments on this. So providing our employees with a modern health savings account option I think is a very, very good and solid idea and I fully support exploring programs that strengthen benefits for uh the entire county workforce. But even a good idea has to follow a good process. The proposed \$25,800 contract uh that originally was 43,000 came to the county because one company reached out directly. The county then contacted a second company for a comparison quote, but in my opinion that is not a competitive uh procurement. For a program of this size and this importance, the only responsible path in my opinion is a public RFP or RFQ that allows any qualified firm to submit a proposal. And I'm sure that there are multiple companies out there that offer these types of programs, but it's impossible to know whether this is a great price, a fair price, or wildly overpriced. It's no different, in my opinion, than buying a car. If you walk onto one lot, look at one car, and accept the first price you're given, you have no idea if you're getting a good deal. You only know the value once you've compared multiple options side by side. The same applies here in this instance. Taxpayers deserve to know that we didn't just take the first number handed to us. That we tested the market and chose the vendor that delivers the best value, the strongest service, and the most reliable platform for our employees. This is not about the merits of the program in my opinion. It's about good government. It's about following established best practices, strengthening public trust, and ensuring that every contract we

approve is defensible, competitive, and in the best interest of the people we serve. So once a proper RFP or RFQ is issued and evaluated, I will gladly support moving forward with the health savings account program that emerges from a transparent and accountable process. But in this instance, I will be voting no.

Commissioner Thom Welby: Commissioner Gaughan's point is well made and well taken. My concern is that that our entering into an RFP our employees won't be able to take advantage of this kind of program and the benefits of it until 2027. And I think if we can do this for one year and allow that time during that time to if we so choose to seek out an RFP or RFQ for this this proposal. I think that's the way I'm leaning and I have to tell you that years and years ago I participated in a flexible spending plan in a previous employer and over the course of the year I kind of forgot about it. I didn't have a ton of money in there but I kind of forgot about it. And then in late December, I was running around to a local pharmacy buying up a an unbelievable load of aspirin and cough medicine and having not used it. And I still didn't use it all. And at that time, you lost it all on December 31st that you didn't that you didn't spend and what I do like about this program in particular, besides the expansion of the things that you can use this this this money for, first it's deducted from your so to speak taxable income, that amount of money, which is terrific, but secondly, you can use it for so many different things as Mr. Bulzoni pointed out, but in particular, you can use it for daycare. You can use all of that money that you put aside that you would have paid to daycare directly regardless of whether or not this exists. You have to pay your daycare. You can take that money, put it directly into the account and from that account pay your daycare provider that amount and save that that granted it's not a ton of money, but you can do that and save money with that. and almost for that reason alone and also the fact that that down the road we can seek out that that RFP. But for that reason I will be voting for it.

Commissioner Chris Chermak: Well, the only thing I have to add is I know that you know with the increases to deductibles and things like that, this is certainly a benefit to our employees and again to have it start beginning of the year would be beneficial to whoever would like to enroll. I think it's a good program and I and I know you've done your homework. I know you've looked into this. It's this wasn't just a spur-of-the- decision. You you've started this, I think, in 2024 looking into these things. I have no issue with it. I think it's a good idea. It's a year contract. It's a local company and it certainly is falls under professional services. So, you know, I have, you know, no problem with putting it out for RFPs and Q's and whatever else there is, but in this case, I think it's such a benefit to our employees that I think it's something that I would definitely approve. So, that's all I have to add.

Aye: 2 - Commissioner Chris Chermak and Thom Welby

Nay: 1 - Commissioner Bill Gaughan

[25-0304](#)

Entering into a Law Enforcement Officer Agreement

Attachments: [Airport LEO Agreement.pdf](#)
 [Res 25-0304.pdf](#)
 [signed 2025 Airport LEO Agreement.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Commissioner Thom Welby, seconded by Commissioner Chris Chermak, that this Resolution be Adopted. The motion

carried by the following vote:

Commissioner Chris Chermak: So Donnie, the one word that I that I don't really love that's in there is if it's forever. Forever. Is that something we can change? General Counsel Don Frederickson: Yeah, it's cancellable by either party. I think it's 30 days notice. Yes.

Commissioner Chris Chermak: So I mean that's forever isn't forever. It is cancellable. I this has been approved by Luzern County Council. Both district attorneys, which in my mind are top law enforcement officers uh are on board. Certainly recommend it. I know DA Sanguedolce is all for it. I know our District Attorney Gallagher is was on board the minute I talked to him about it. Again, it's, you know, we live in a crazy world right now and any extra security to me is a benefit to all. I just traveled over the holiday. Matter of fact, I was talking to some LEOs in other airports. So, other airports are utilizing this way of law enforcement and for us, it's just a little added extra bonus. It's a small number. For us, I think it's \$36,000 for Lackawanna and both Luzerne to pay. I mean to me, if you break that down per day, that's a very inexpensive little extra security and folks with arresting powers. So, you know, I certainly don't have an issue with it. It's certainly cancelable at any time if we decide not to do it anymore. if the district attorney decide that it's not necessary or if the federal government steps back in and wants to start funding it again, which I would certainly be after them to do that.

General Counsel Don Frederickson: And that's something that both counties and the airport has been bothering our representatives and senators to try to reestablish that funding because it was cut. I think it was two years ago it was cut from the budget and you know that was that paid for the program for the most part. I think the airport did contribute 5,000 a month uh towards the difference, but uh you know it was covered by the federal government otherwise and we've been petitioning them to reinstate that money but it hasn't occurred yet.

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: On the question, I want to be very clear while why I will not be voting for the LEO program. But before I do, I'd like to again explain what this actually is and what's been happening at the airport. For many, many years, the airport participated in a federal TSA initiative called the LEO program, short for law enforcement officer program. It reimbursed local police departments for having officers on site as a supplemental presence. The key word there is federal. In 2024, TSA ended that funding nationwide, not just in Pennsylvania, across the country. It wasn't cut by Lackawanna County. It wasn't cut by Luzern County. It simply no longer exists. Since then, Luzerne County has voluntarily paid about \$12,000 a month to keep a version of that program going. And it's my understanding that the district attorney from Luzerne County hires those officers or whoever he sees fit and the airport chipped in another \$5,000 a month. But it is no longer a federally supported federally supported or federally required program. It is an unfunded add-on that the federal government does not require or support. And this is a key point, one that the airport's own officials say that they do not need. And this is what I'm basing my vote on today. And I'll refer to the minutes from the airport board meeting from October 23rd, 2025. And I'll quote them directly.

Commissioner Gaughan asks public safety director Baylor, who by the way is a former air marshal, if the airport was safe. Mr. Baylor, former air marshal, public safety director, said it is safe. Commissioner Gaughan then asked, "Do we need the LEO program?" To which Mr. Baylor replied, "No, the LEO program is not required by law. TSA has also indicated that it is not required and they do not support it." Commissioner Gaughan then asked Mr. Beardsley,

the airport director, "Do we need this program?" Mr. Beardsley responded, "No." Mr. Gaughan then asked Miss Teichman who is the deputy director of the airport if the LEO program is warranted and she replied no. Now why would they say that we don't need to pay for this program and we don't need this program because the airport pays \$500,000 a year for a 247 armed security force. TSA has its own armed personnel. Local police can and do respond when needed. Just like everywhere else, the idea that airport professionals, armed federal agents, and a fully funded 247 airport security force are not enough, and only an optional program that we used to have funding for can save us, in my opinion, defies logic, math, and gravity. This is like being told by your mechanic, "Your brakes are fine." And then Luzerne County jumps in and says, "Pay for new brakes anyway. Don't you support safety?" Or it's like someone insisting that you buy a fire extinguisher for a house they admit isn't on fire, doesn't have a stove, and has a sprinkler system already installed. In my opinion, it's absurd. What's even more absurd is the assistant airport director BJ Teichman did an analysis of the LEO program and found that just this year between April and September, even with the program, the LEO program active, there were six days out of the month with no police coverage from the LEO program and 24 days out of the month where they were present eight hours or less proving that it's not the magic shield that some pretend it is. And again, there was a lot more to her analysis and that is what outside of it not being funded anymore led every airport official to say we don't recommend that you pay for this program. So in conclusion, what's being proposed here would commit Lackawanna County to pay for additional police coverage at the airport that serves no demonstrated purpose, adds no measurable benefit to passengers. Our own airport officials say is redundant and unjustified and provides no improvement to airport operations. It's a solution in search of a problem and a very expensive one at that. So for those reasons and out of simple respect for the taxpayers of Lackawanna County and the operational expertise of the men and women at the airport, I will be voting no. And what I said at the airport meeting was, I don't know how to run an airport. I've only been on an airplane once in my life, but I take the advice of the people who do know how to run an airport. These are people with decades and decades of experience in running an airport. The public safety director, as I've mentioned twice now, and I kept mentioning down at the airport meeting, is a former air marshal with decades of experience in public safety. If he thought it was important and he told the board or told me we need this program, absolutely, I would back it a thousand percent. The district attorney had the nerve down in Luzerne County to insinuate that I think Mr. Griffith and I, the controller from Luzerne County, were somehow defunding the police. It's not the case at all. It's defunding the unnecessary. I mean, we just got out of a 30, we're coming out of the hole of a \$37 million deficit, \$19 million in unpaid bills. We don't have the wherewithal to pay for programs that their people at the airport are telling us you don't need it. So, that's why I will be voting no on this program today. Not because I don't support the police departments across Lackawanna County, because I support common sense and I support following the people who know how to run an airport. Thank you.

Commissioner Thom Welby: Obviously wasn't around for the meetings a year or so ago or the conversations between the counties regarding this, but I do have concerns and serious feelings about this, particularly regarding law enforcement and regarding security in 2025. What what's been happening in in our country in particular, there's things around the world, but what's been happening in our country is almost beyond comprehension. Some of the horrible terrorist things that and just horrors that happened just a week ago.

What happened with our national guardsmen just somebody comes around the corner and fires on them and kills one of them and mortally wounds a second and so many things that are going on that that that we can't prepare for. I think that we need to do everything that we can, as much as he can we can now this is going to cost us a little less than \$40,000 a year which was which isn't chump change for sure but still it concerns me that that for something that has existed for 10 years there to lessen the impression that the public might have of security at our airport deeply concerns me to put out there that we're going to have lesser whether they're the sheriffs or hired deputies, whatever they are, the law enforcement officials that would be there. I want to make a clear impression to the public, a clear impression to anyone that that might have misgivings and thoughts that tend toward evil. I want to make very clear to all of them that security will be as strong as we can possibly do at our airport, at our county government buildings, and wherever we go and I'm sorry that I wasn't there to participate in the conversations in the past, but I feel very strongly about making it very clear to everybody that they are safe in our public buildings and in our airport in our transportation center. So I will be voting yes for this.

Aye: 2 - Commissioner Chris Chermak and Thom Welby

Nay: 1 - Commissioner Bill Gaughan

Opportunity for the Public to Address the Board

Bob Bolus, Scranton: Mr. Welby. Welcome. I'm a frequent traveler through the airport. I'm also a pilot and I go a lot through the general aviation and I have not seen anything there that would constitute not being secured walking through that airport. There's security. There's people all over the place. If there's an issue, they could restrain somebody till the police either Pittston Dupont Old Forge whatever respond there. So that's my opinion. I think our airport is very safe and I'm through there quite frequently. In fact, I just come back through there Monday. Moving on. Mr. Gaughan, I still have and it's active is the lawsuit against you using taxpayer money to uh challenge everything that was going on. It's still an active lawsuit and hopefully we'll suffice in it as soon as it gets to court. I also filed against the tax assessor here and preventing him from filing and certifying the reassessment. And we're asking that it be heard in a court but asked for a court in another jurisdiction outside of out of Lackawanna County and we're going to get an answer. Plus, there's also a challenge in this against the tax increase against the people of this county and we just got to do things. I have a ready to file a lawsuit against Lackawanna Italian claim attorney Joseph Joyce his firm for fraudulent transfers of real estate and that's going to happen and it's going to be an embarrassment to the county that we have people that have no regard and disregard other people what's going on and fraudulently transfer property properties that they know is illegal to do, yet they go do it. So, they're going to pay at a price. Moving on, past that, I donated 600 cooked turkeys and turkey breasts to the veterans in Berwick, PA, who needed it. And at least they'll have a meal for Thanksgiving. I have now coming up the Bob Bolus 32nd Christmas Day dinner that I've done for the last 32 years. It's open to all those that don't want to be home alone on Christmas. We deliver two meals to a family and they can come and take takeouts if they so desire. The phone number that we

have is 272-250-3128 and that's to order a dinner. We deliver two meals to a family and we do it that way because we believe that seniors are the ones that should get a meal, not 10 people sitting in the house that could come to the dinner, pick up a takeout and have their dinner. And to put it, it's one of the best places to be on Christmas Day. And for the last 32 years, I'm there slicing up turkeys and representing who we are as Scrantonians. It's at St. Pat's Church, All Saints Academy on Jackson Street here in Scranton. And if you can't get there, call us. We'll send somebody to pick you up and bring you to the dinner. Our volunteers are tremendous and what they do and they do for everyone else. And I brought it here today to the county to get this message out to do what we're doing. And lastly, I'm strongly suggesting we set up a PTSD clinic in Lackawanna County. Just look at the kid that was playing with Dallas that committed suicide, 20some years old. He had issues. If he went to one of our clinics, and I have a clinic that we're going to establish with a clinic representative that can do what we need to do to save lives in here. PTSD is a poison, literally a brain poison that affects a lot of people. And with the clinical psychologist, Dr. Lynenfeld, we have a program. I've already had them at the VA that I flew him up here and I strongly suggest we do it. We could use the church. I have the Holy Cross former church or the hall to set up a clinic. And I'm asking the county to look out for the lives of the people that need help. Thank you.

Walter Griffith: First of all, I want to thank Commissioner Gaughan for having the intestinal fortitude to stand up for the people of this county. This LEO agreement is a bad agreement for the county. It's vague. Doesn't outline anything for the controller who has to pay the payables. Mr. Welby wasn't at any of the meetings at all to dis to discuss any of this LEO agreement. How he could vote yes on it and not abstain is beyond me. Doesn't even know what's in the agreement. Apparently, the agreement doesn't it, according to Luzerne County, it says the two-year agreement calls for the airport to be staffed with police officers from surrounding municipalities. Yet, the agreement doesn't say that at all. The agreement says it's going to be staffed with task force officers. So, which is it? We can have police officers from surrounding municipalities or we can have task force officers. Does anybody have the answer to that question? because I'm totally in the dark on this is the controller of the county and I should know the answers to that. If I don't know the answers to those questions, how in the name of God are the people of this county going to know? If I can't get the answers as an elected official of our county, how are anybody who's residents of this county going to know? It states in Mr. Welby said it it's going to give us save us \$40,000 a year. Cost \$40,000 a year. Where did that number come from, Mr. Welby? No idea. There is nothing in the agreement that says it's going to cost 25% of \$40,000. It doesn't say that anywhere in this agreement. It says you're responsible for 25% of the cost. What is the cost? That's my question is the controller. >>

Commissioner Chris Chermak: \$36,000.

Walter Griffith: Where did you where did that number come from? Where is it in the agreement?

Commissioner Chris Chermak: Donnie, where do we get that number?

General Counsel Don Frederickson: That's from the district attorney's office. based upon what we've been paying yearly for the that's what the program's been costing and not that what we've been paying but that's what the program's been costing for the last couple of years, Commissioner.

Walter Griffith: Right, but there's nothing in the agreement that states that there's nothing in the agreement that states that so at the at now the county has passed the agreement what's to stop the district attorney from charging

any number he wants to the counties he's getting 25% what's to stop that there's nothing in the agreement contracts are not for the good times solicitor contracts just for you Contracts are for the bad times. This is this is how the contracts work. We put language in the contract to protect the citizens of this county and Luzerne County. If we're not going to put that language in there, how do we know? How do we how do we take care of all that information? Very, very disappointing. We have an agreement that was settled to the solicitor's point. This is not executive session privilege. The process that the security has done is executive session. Sure. The agreement is not. There's no reason in the world why the people of the county of Luzerne or Lackawanna don't know that this agreement was drafted to the point that they had a meeting at the airport and never gave the agreement to the public to discuss. That's how that's how in the dark this whole agreement was. It's is shameful. Shameful that we have a Republican who sits on this commissioner board who voted for this. No transparency, no accountability, and no integrity. None. None. That agreement should never have been adopted by this council or this commissioner body and should have never been forced on the people of this county. I've been fighting this thing and it's only been in effect since 2021 to Mr. Frederickson's information. 2021 this program went into place and it was bad then and it's bad today and it has nothing to do with security. All they do is do security checkpoint checks. That's all they do. Nothing else. They don't patrol the airport. They don't arrest people on the airport grounds. If you park your car out front and you're not supposed to be there, they don't arrest you for that. This is airport security checkpoint officers. That's all they do. They sit there and wait until the TSA calls them and says, "We have someone in line that has contraband. We need to arrest them and they come out and they do that." How that circumvents our security at the airport or enhances it is beyond my comprehension. I've been through the airport many times, too. I've never seen a problem with security there. I've parked out front. They've told me to move my car. So, I don't understand what the deal is behind the scenes for this whole LEO program. But, it's annoying to me. Very annoying because the people deserve better. The people deserve better transparency. The people deserve better information in an agreement that locks the taxpayers into a fund that they have no idea what that's going to cost them. This is shameful. shameful for Lackawanna and shameful for Luzerne. And I'm embarrassed as an elected official of my county to think that we're going to actually pass this agreement with that kind of language in there. And we have a commissioner who wasn't at a single meeting to know what this agreement even says and voted yes and a brand new commissioner at that.

Commissioner Thom Welby: Mr. Griffith, I appreciate your passion for taxpayers dollars. I truly do. I was at the last airport board meeting and also the information regarding this is rather public. The media has been promoting and doing stories on this and the content of this agreement for quite some time. I think most everyone in this room is at least somewhat familiar with this program. And as far as the people that would be hired, I don't think there is anyone that would be signing a check that would look at this as an open checkbook issue. There's an agreement and an understanding as to how much this is going to cost. The ballpark is around \$150,000 and also the ballpark for our county is around \$3,000 a month or \$36,000, under \$40,000, as I said before, it's a program that has been in effect and it's a program, as you said, you feel safe while you're up there. Well, you feel safe while you're up there because of what exists right now. And the people that are being hired are law enforcement officers. I'm happy with that. If we have additional law enforcement officers up there, better yet, but I don't want to see a lessening in

the number of law enforcement officers in that airport.

General Counsel Don Frederickson: I would just point out too, we ultimately the ultimate check on this agreement is if it becomes too expensive, we can opt out at any time with 30 days notice.

Joan Hodowanitz, Scranton: And I got an entirely different topic, but one that's probably more annoying. If you've been watching the goings on at Scranton City Council lately, you know that one of the issues they're debating is an amendment to the zoning up by Geisinger CMC. And I realize that that's a Scranton issue. It affects their zoning board and their city council and you don't have a say in it per se. But now I'm talking to everybody who lives in lives or works in Lackawanna County because health care is an issue that everybody should pay attention to. See, I see that guy right there. Not a single gray hair on his head. And that guy right there, too. Okay, you're all young. Mr. Welby and, I don't dye my hair, but look at that white hair on him. When you get in your 60s and your 70s or beyond, you're going to find out two things about health care that are problematic. One is cost and the other one is access. And that's a major issue in all of Lackawanna County. Geisinger CMC, isn't that the only trauma center we have in the county? You know, so the fact that they're pushing for a zoning amendment for them to enhance and enlarge their operations, obviously the residents in the immediate area have concerns about their quality of life and can it even be done properly but all the residents should be watching this. You know, by the grace of God, I get my care through the VA because I was stupid enough to go into the army. Okay? And my little guardian angel took care of me all my life but I do get to see the explanation of benefits that Medicare will send you to see some of the costs. I have about 10 prescriptions. One of them cost \$5,000 every 28 days. That's one. Okay. I had a little device put in my chest to monitor my heart rhythm. That little device the size of a AAA battery. \$31,000. Okay. And these are cheap expenditures. I spent 12 days in the hospital in 2013. the bill for the room, which was not a private room a few dollars less than \$80,000. So, you young people, if you think that buying a house and a mortgage is expensive or your utilities are expensive or the price of a car is expensive, God help you when you're 75 years old because this stuff isn't getting any cheaper. Every year it's going up double digits. So when this issue with Geisinger came up, okay, this is something that every resident and worker in Lackawanna County should pay attention to because sooner or later you're going to be 75 years old, okay? And if you don't have both access and the ability to pay for good health care, you're going to be up the creek without a canoe. And there's no reason why you cannot write letters to the editor. Contact your elected representatives about your views and what you want and what you think is the right thing to do. Do not let this this issue just pass you by like reassessment or the taxes or whatever and then you get the bill in the mail because that bill's you live long enough you're going to get that bill unless of course you join the army which I strongly recommend you consider but if you know failing that kind of health care you know which I by the grace of God get through the VA I don't know where I'd get the me. My mother had Alzheimer's. Okay, if you want to see a bill, look at that. She wasn't in skilled nursing, but her bill for memory care \$48,000 a year. So, that's just something I want to bring up. Yeah, LEO is important, but so is healthcare. Thank you.

Commissioners' Other Business

Commissioner Thom Welby: Joan, thank you for your service. Thank you for your sacrifice and your comments regarding Guisinger Community Medical Center are well made and well taken and it's something that that we don't have

any say over. We also don't have any say over data centers and other things, but we certainly have our opinions and I have I'm actually kind of glad that we don't have to make a decision regarding that that issue. But I had personal experience just a few months ago where an immediate family member was having a health issue and I had a difficult time getting her to agree to go to the hospital and she finally relented and we went up to Geisinger Community Medical Center. And as we got up to the doorway there looking into the emergency room waiting room, there had to be 30 or 40 people in there standing. It was a bunch of people standing including a gentleman standing in there with an IV pole waiting to get into emergency services and my wife excuse me guess I said who it was but she immediately said I am not going in there. We were there months before about another issue and she was in there for almost six hours before they saw her after her treatment. She had to wait an hour and a half to be discharged after the treatment. And as she stood there in that doorway, she said, "I'm not going." I said, "Kath, we have to go in. You have an issue. We have to go in." And she was having some chest pain and heart palpitations. And she said, "No, I'm not going in." And she meant it and she agreed that we would go somewhere else. I called my brother who is an emergency room a registered nurse and we said we were going to go up to Lehigh and he said if it's a heart issue they're only going to bring you back to CMC because they don't deal with the heart issues. Said go down to Mercy go down to Regional Hospital which we did. We got right in for treatment at I still say Mercy at regional and she was in the middle of a of a heart situation and they literally had to stop and restart her heart twice while we were in there. And I know everything worked out well. She's doing fabulous now. But I know in my heart I know that there are dozens and dozens if not gosh hundreds of other people that came up to that doorway the same way that we did that said no, I'm not going in there and went home instead and I you know there's there's no numbers that any of us have regarding successes or failures regarding that. But there's no doubt in my mind that there are people that went home and there are people that are no longer with us because they opted not to wait that that four or five or six hours, however long it might be before they got back into the treatment area of the emergency room. So that that's a very difficult situation. And I also have an immediate family member who lives up there and is part of the group that is against this. And I understand that perspective as well. I wouldn't want a monolith out my back window of a home that that that I've lived in for how however many years and I enjoy and I love the just that whole neighborhood of of Nay Aug Park and that area of the hill section. It's very difficult, but it's something that that I think the three of us up here are kind of glad that we're not involved in that because it's a it's a very very difficult situation to put these people that are making these decisions into and the people that live up in the hill section that that are, you know, weighing this amongst themselves. The value of a life is pretty important, but quality of life is important as well. And, Joan, again, thank you for your service. And also I want to thank Mr. Tim Booth, our director of veterans affairs. Thank you, Tim, for your service. Thank you for your sacrifice. Thank you for all that you do for our veterans. The county veterans affairs department is one of the stand out counties in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in service to our veterans. I know of a lot of veterans that that I went to school with that served in Vietnam and some of them didn't come home. Some of them came home and came home damaged, didn't come home as they left and and I have friends that I worked with in the 80s at a place that were suffering from Agent Orange issues and one in particular his back was literally breaking out and he was told into the 90s that he was wrong that that wasn't Agent Orange and they didn't treat

him and that continued. I know veterans that went down to the VA in Wilkes Barre and were told that that their issue wasn't caused by their service and it wasn't true and they swore at that time they will never go back to the VA hospital ever again and some of them still live that to this day but years ago maybe whatever maybe six or eight or 10 years ago maybe it was even goes back to the late 20s but that that service changed and our county veterans affairs department is part of the reason that are changed and our veterans now are being treated with the respect and the dignity that they deserve. And Tim, thank you for your work in that. And thank you to our team and thank you also to the people now down in the Veterans Affairs center in Wilkes Barre and thank you thank you for your service and thank you to all of our veterans that have made that sacrifice and thank you to the families of those veterans because they suffered and sacrificed as well.

Commissioner Chris Chermak: Well, I want to thank everybody for coming today. I appreciate everybody's input. I want to remind folks that coming up this weekend is our winter market that's going to be at Courthouse Square. Friday night, it's 5:00. It goes from 5 until 9 on Friday with 6:00 we'll be lighting the Christmas tree. Saturdays 11:00 a.m. till 9:00 p.m. and Sunday 11:00 a.m. till 4:00 p.m. There's going to be a lot going on. I'm pretty sure Maureen, our director, is at Defcon 5 right now trying to set up those booths and things with the snow that we got but there's a little over 50 businesses and local vendors that are going to be there. There's live entertainment, so there's going to be a lot to do. It looks like it's going to be a nice weekend, so encourage everyone to get out and again, we're getting into the holiday season, so just, you know, a lot of issues that we deal with every day, but be thankful for what we have and just enjoy the day.

Commissioner Thom Welby: So, the Lackawanna Winter Market is fabulous. It starts Friday and it starts off also with the lighting of the tree the Christmas tree. The commissioners will be participating in and also the festival of trees. The festival of trees every year goes on and hopefully you all participate or see that. It's on the I almost said spruce tree the Biden Street or Spruce Street side if you will of the courthouse and that's just fabulous. This year's theme is Red, White, and You, celebrating freedom, unity, and diversity in conjunction with America's 250 coming up. Also first Friday, Friday evening. Just some other things that are going on in in in our county this weekend, like the Peckville Holiday House, which is just incredible. It's actually getting more than just regional attention. What they do up there is fabulous. and I'm not sure about the Moosic Street holiday house if that's going to happen again this year. We appreciate all that has been done by the gentleman that did that and his passing is he surely missed, but also we have our lights at Nay Aug Park are going on and that's free drive through Nay Aug Park. If you want to make a donation when you come out of the park, it's that money is used to help provide some of the improvements and also the summer free summer concerts that are up there. But one other thing that I just found out about today, and I'm so happy to to share this with you, a lot of you probably already know it, but there used to be a little miniature train exhibit, actually, a miniature Scranton exhibit that that that used to exist. I used to go see it up at the Gertude Hawk store up in Dunmore and I believe it was first back in the Keyser Oak Shopping Center. It was Don Clark put together this miniature memories display that was just fabulous. Then also, after it had no other places to go, it was in the Mall at Steamtown for a while. Well, attorney Chris Munley stepped up and has provide for the reestablishment of Don's miniature memories. Chris bought the whole thing, put it all back together, and it's on display up at the Everhart Museum today and going through the holidays. So, that's just a real treat. If

you want to go up and catch that Scranton miniature display, it's just a real treat to see. And thank you to attorney Chris Munley for doing that for our community.

Adjournment

This meeting was adjourned at 11:39am.

Aye: 3 - Commissioner Chris Chermak, Commissioner Bill Gaughan and Thom Welby