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Schnirman Year One Progress Report Includes Millions Recovered for Taxpayers and New Emphasis on Reform

Mineola, NY -Nassau County Comptroller Jack Schnirman today released his Year One Progress Report that outlines how he and his team have made progress on the four promises he made upon taking office in 2018.

“We laid out our goals for our term, and I’m proud to report on our year-one progress. We’ve recovered millions of dollars for taxpayers, exposed wasteful government practices, fought on behalf of labor, and laid out Nassau County’s finances honestly,” Schnirman said. “Our residents invest in this community because Nassau County is a great place to live, work, and raise a family. In return for that investment, it is government’s job to hold up its end of the deal, and I am excited by both the progress our office has made and the plans we have for 2019.”

In his Year One Progress Report, Schnirman detailed the achievements made by his team in fulfilling the four promises.

1. Open and Modernize the County ’s Finances

- ✓ For the first time in nearly a decade, the Comptroller’s Office published its annual Comprehensive Annual Financial Report on time so that it could be reviewed by the public well ahead of budget meetings.
- ✓ All major financial reports coming out of the Comptroller’s Office use the GAAP national standard when available. No more switching back and forth between **different sets of books**. We showed that the County had a Rainy Day fund in a \$68.8 million deficit in 2017 and projected a \$117.1 million operating deficit for 2018.
- ✓ The Comptroller’s Office began a multi-year project reforming the county’s outdated and inefficient financial software. The 1980s software Nassau County currently uses wastes hundreds of staff hours, is prone to mistakes that need to be manually corrected, and our external auditors have identified it as a material weakness.

2. Smart Audits that Ask the Tough Questions

- The Comptroller’s Office completed six audits and launched seven new audits in 2018.
- Totaled up, our office found more than \$16.5 million in wastefully spent money, recovered taxpayer funds, and wages owed to employees of County vendors.

- The newly launched smart audits “follow the money” by looking into the operations of:
 - The Assessment Review Commission, which handles tax grievances;
 - The County Industrial Development Agency, which hands out tax breaks to developers; and
 - Hiring and staff management throughout County government with a first of its kind Nepotism Audit.
- Audits that were completed in 2018 identified
 - More than \$6 million in missing PILOT payments, along with \$7.6 million recovered that was put back into the County’s general fund;
 - More than \$2 million in sewer hookup fees due to favorable contracts given to certain developers; and
 - More than \$200,000 in missing wages owed to employees of county vendors who weren’t following the living wage law.
- All of our audits can be found online at <https://www.nassaucountyny.gov/4680/Audits>

3. **Clean up and Reform County Contracting**

- We are eliminating the endless boxes of paperwork that made the county’s contracting process slow and more difficult to review, and we are replacing it with an electronic system.
 - This allows for our investigators to review more documents quicker.
- Efficiencies made in the Comptroller’s Claims division led to bills being paid to vendors and nonprofits 12% faster than in 2017.
- Implementing new ethics rules through a Comptroller’s Directive to root out conflicts of interests for vendors and contractors.
 - That is why we are collaborating with the County Executive, District Attorney, and Inspector General to ensure stronger oversight of our more than \$1 billion in County contracts and expenditures.
- Reviewing the approximately 60,000 claims the County pays every year, we are consolidating utility accounts for efficiency and ensuring that the County doesn’t pay out erroneous bills—like a \$4,300 American Water bill that should have been no more than \$50.

4. **Report It, Reform It**

- One of the first things we did upon getting into office was to establish a dedicated tip line at ReportItReformIt@NassauCountyNY.gov
 - Our investigators in many instances have met directly with tipsters to get more information.
- The Report It, Reform It program has been recognized nationally by the National Association of Counties, and it’s getting results.
- Its immediate success was a big reason why the Comptroller’s Office also launched a dedicated multilingual Living Wage hotline this summer, 516-571-WAGE, which almost immediately doubled the number of reports we received from the prior year.

In addition, the newly launched Policy and Research Unit is focused on producing data-driven reports to help inform the policy-making process by identifying innovative solutions for Nassau County’s challenges. Reports in 2018 included a Veteran’s

Advocacy Issue Brief, Fact Sheet on Food Insecurity in Nassau County, and a Demographic Profile titled “This is Nassau.” All of our reports can be found online at <https://www.nassaucountyny.gov/4681/Fact-Sheets-and-Data-Analysis>.

Looking to the year ahead, the Comptroller’s Office will be releasing additional reports including its first installment of the Countywide Nepotism audit.

“Our team has spent the year fighting corruption and reforming County government so that we can invest in and deliver the services that you care about,” Schnirman said. “We’re not going to take our foot off of the gas in 2019; there’s work to be done to improve our local government and make living in Nassau more equitable for veterans, seniors, working families, and millennials.”