



NEWS FROM

ULSTER COUNTY

County Executive Jen Metzger

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Ulster County Executive Jen Metzger Proposes Local Law to Establish Common-Sense Identification Standards for Law Enforcement

Law Aims to Ensure Safety, Transparency and Accountability

KINGSTON, NY - Ulster County Executive Jen Metzger today announced the introduction of a new local law that would establish clear, Countywide standards for law enforcement identifiability during public-facing operations. The legislation, titled the “Baseline Standards for Law Enforcement Identifiability Law,” is co-sponsored by Legislature Chair Peter Criswell and Legislators Debra Clinton and Eric Stewart, who chair the Public Safety and Health, Human Services and Human Rights Committees, respectively.

The proposed administrative law is designed to establish a clear, consistent expectation that during public-facing encounters, members of the public can readily identify both the agency and the individual officer exercising authority.

Under the proposal, officers engaged in public-facing law enforcement activity — including those serving on federal, state, local, and multi-agency task forces — would be required to display visible identification, such as a last name, badge number, or unique identifying number, and to provide that information verbally upon request. The law also establishes a presumption against the use of facial-concealing masks unless there is a specific operational necessity, such as undercover work, emergency protective equipment, or other narrowly defined circumstances.

“Public trust is the foundation of public safety. When someone is stopped, questioned, or

directed by law enforcement, they should be able to clearly identify who is exercising authority over them,” **said Ulster County Executive Jen Metzger.** “This law establishes a common-sense standard that will protect the public and officers, alike, by reducing confusion, preventing impersonation, and strengthening transparency. Officers should not be masked or concealing their identities as a standard practice, which runs counter to public safety and to the level of transparency and accountability we expect in a democracy.”

“Anonymity undermines oversight and transparency,” **said Ulster County Sheriff Juan Figueroa.** “While masking can be justified in confidential investigations, it is unnecessary in routine operations. Public trust diminishes when law enforcement creates fear rather than communicating with common sense transparency.”

"Communities across the country are having this conversation about law enforcement identifiability and accountability," **said Peter Criswell, Chair of the Ulster County Legislature.** "This law establishes clear standards that protect constitutional rights while supporting effective law enforcement. Ulster County is showing how local government can lead with proactive policy that ensures transparency, accountability, and public trust. I look forward to moving it through the legislative process."

“This proposed law strengthens trust on all sides. When people know who is giving an order, interactions are safer and more accountable for everyone,” **said Legislator Debra Clinton, Chair of the Law Enforcement and Public Safety Committee.** “These are practical, common-sense standards that support good policing and a stronger relationship between law enforcement and the community.”

“This legislation is about clarity and trust,” **said Legislator Eric Stewart, Chair of the Health, Human Services and Human Rights Committee.** “When officers are identifiable, interactions are safer, tensions are lower, and the public can be confident that those exercising authority are who they say they are. These are basic expectations in a healthy democracy, and I want to thank County Executive Metzger for introducing this legislation. I’m proud to support this measure.”

The legislation does not mandate how agencies conduct operations; instead, it sets a baseline public-safety standard that ensures transparency, prevents impersonation, and protects the public’s Constitutional right to seek accountability.

If an officer or agency fails to comply with the law, the matter would be reviewed through an administrative process. All complaints will be handled by the Ulster County Human Rights

Department, and any necessary funding to administer the process will come from the department's budget. If the law moves forward, Ulster County will contract with two independent attorneys — one to serve as administrative counsel and one to serve as the hearing officer — to ensure a fair, impartial review of any alleged violations. These attorneys would determine whether a violation occurred and whether a warning, corrective order, or civil penalty is appropriate.

The law includes clearly defined exceptions, including undercover operations, emergency protective equipment, hazard-related masking, protective services details, exigent circumstances, and situations where compliance would conflict with federal or state law.

If approved to move forward at the Legislature's April session, the proposed law will proceed to a public hearing in May.

The proposed law is grounded in longstanding state and federal policies prohibiting law enforcement impersonation and is designed to support public safety, de-escalation, and Constitutional rights. It affirms the County's home-rule authority to enact generally applicable public-safety regulations governing conduct in shared public spaces — similar to traffic rules, emergency-vehicle lighting requirements, and other standards that apply to all agencies operating within the County.

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