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Joint Statement of Mayor Lewis and City Attorney Lavine

Today, the Tompkins County Ethics Advisory Board issued its advisory opinion on concerns that the City has taken seriously from the start. That is why, about nine months ago and at substantial expense, the City commissioned an independent investigation that was exhaustively conducted by outside counsel Kristen Smith, partner at a prominent upstate law firm and former Corporation Counsel for the City of Syracuse. Ms. Smith's investigation was impartial, searching and deeply transparent in the array of interviews, emails, and key documents that it disclosed, all in an extensive report released via the City's website December 8th. Ms. Smith's report found no ethics violations and shed light on welcome opportunities for improving City policy and procedures.

In contrast, the County's investigation exceeded the lawful advisory scope permitted it by New York law (specifically, Section 808 of the General Municipal Law), a serious defect that the County failed to remedy even after multiple requests from the City across many months. This failure rendered various City witnesses unable to participate in interviews with the County, though the County did consider the detailed factual record included in Ms. Smith's investigative report, reflecting interviews with many of those same witnesses. Additionally, various City witnesses did provide substantial written responses and hundreds of pages of responsive documents to the County's inquiries; this included written responses from the Mayor and the City Attorney, which responses were consistently factual, accurate, and authorized by both of them.