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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kovacs Proposes Comprehensive Rules for County Recordings, Surveillance and Employee Monitoring

Resolution would modernize the County's 2018 policy and protect lawful independent investigations

KINGSTON, NY — Ulster County Legislator Jason Kovacs (R/C – District 3) has proposed a comprehensive policy governing how County officials and employees record communications, use surveillance equipment, monitor employees, and safeguard the resulting records.

Resolution 521 would replace the County's 2018 recording policy with standards addressing today's technology, including employee-facing cameras, automated transcription, facial recognition, and artificial intelligence.

"Technology has moved well beyond recording a telephone conversation," Kovacs said. "Ulster County needs clear rules about who can authorize surveillance, when people must be notified, who can access the recordings, and how those records are protected. Employees and residents deserve to know that these decisions are being made responsibly."

The proposal generally requires advance notice before recording private communications concerning County business, including recordings made with personal devices or outside transcription services.

Surveillance technology would require a documented governmental purpose and written authorization, subject to specified exceptions for lawful investigations, public safety, emergencies, and other protected activities.

The resolution also establishes legislative oversight of programs that systematically monitor employees, use employee-facing cameras, continuously capture audio, or employ automated analysis or biometric identification. Depending on how a program is approved and funded, its surveillance use would require express legislative authorization or a 45 day review period during which the Legislature could disapprove it.

Covert workplace surveillance would be subject to stricter requirements and could not be used for routine attendance or productivity monitoring, political purposes, retaliation, or intimidation. The

proposal also protects collective bargaining rights and requires compliance with applicable obligations before implementing technology affecting employees' terms and conditions of employment.

"We should be able to protect County facilities, investigate wrongdoing, and preserve evidence while respecting privacy and the rights of our workforce," Kovacs said. "A camera or recording system should have a defined purpose, clear limits, and meaningful oversight."

The resolution expressly preserves lawful investigations by the County Comptroller and other offices possessing independent investigative authority, without requiring permission from the County Executive or another official outside the investigating office. It also protects the authorized law enforcement and prosecutorial activities of the Sheriff and District Attorney.

Recordings made for official County purposes would remain governmental records regardless of whether they were created on County equipment, personal devices, or third-party platforms. The policy would require secure official custody, restricted access, and compliance with records retention and disclosure obligations. Contractors would be prohibited from selling County recordings or using the data to train algorithms for purposes unrelated to their County contracts.

"This proposal respects the independence of elected officials while establishing clear responsibilities for handling public records," Kovacs said. "The goal is a practical, consistent policy that protects the public, County employees, and the integrity of County government."

Resolution 521 has been referred to the Legislature's Laws, Rules and Government Services Committee. Existing surveillance systems covered by the transition provisions would have 120 days to obtain the required written authorization.