



New cages in the cat holding area at the renovated Finger Lakes SPCA of Central New York in Auburn.



One of the new cat holding areas at the renovated Finger Lakes SPCA of Central New York in Auburn.



KEVIN RIVOLI PHOTOS, THE CITIZEN

Bolt waits in one of the new holding pens for adoption at the newly renovated Finger Lakes SPCA of Central New York in Auburn.

COURT

Doctor
sues ACH
over firing

Claims hospital retaliated
after he raised concerns

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A doctor who says he was fired for raising concerns about patient safety and a surgeon's conduct is suing Auburn Community Hospital.

Dr. Xi Yang, who was the chief of anesthesiology at Auburn Community Hospital since February 2020, filed a lawsuit in Cayuga County Court on Thursday accusing the hospital of wrongful termination, whistleblower retaliation and unjust enrichment. He is seeking an unspecified amount of financial damages from the hospital.

According to the lawsuit, Yang was informed by his staff in July that a surgeon at Auburn Community Hospital would perform surgeries in the operating room and, while patients were still under anesthesia, would leave the area to return to his clinic for appointments with non-surgical patients.

Langston McFadden, an attorney who is representing Yang, previously told The Citizen that the alleged actions would violate billing and safety guidelines. The lawsuit states that the practice by the surgeon, who was identified as Dr. Daniel Alexander, raises "immense quality-of-care and safety concerns for hospital patients but also lends itself to possible fraudulent billing practices."

After Yang learned of the alleged conduct, he sent a letter on Aug. 15 to two members of the hospital's management team — Dr. James Syrett, who is the chief medical officer, and Tammy Sunderlin, senior vice president of patient care services — and Dr. Alan Sherburne, who is the president of the medical staff and an Auburn Community Hospital board member. In the letter, Yang requested an investigation into the "patient safety, quality-of-care and liability risks" raised by his staff.

Three days later, on Aug. 18, Yang met with Auburn Community Hospital

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Auburn shelter receives new kennels, medical facilities, more

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The Finger Lakes SPCA of Central New York in Auburn recently completed a major renovation for the convenience of staff, visitors and, most importantly, its animals.

The shelter's 70-year-old kennels have been replaced with larger and quieter ones, and a modern clinic, surgery suite and designated quarantine areas have been added to ensure sick animals receive proper treatment while protecting the health of others. The renovation also includes new HVAC systems, insulation and siding for

 **VIEW:** For more photos and video of the shelter, point your smartphone camera at the QR code and tap the link. **NEWSVU**

better year-round temperature control, as well as a new adoption greeting room, entranceway and employee work areas.

The renovation cost roughly \$700,000, with \$482,491.50 coming from a grant from the New York State Companion Animal Capital Fund. The shelter also raised \$95,750 in donations through a capital campaign to match an \$80,000 grant from the

Fred L. Emerson Foundation, and received a \$35,000 grant from the Stanley W. Metcalf Foundation.

The fundraising was necessary, the shelter said, because the renovation brings it into compliance with the Companion Animal Care Standards Act for Shelters and Rescues that goes into effect Dec. 15.

For more information about the shelter, visit flspcaofny.org or facebook.com/fingerlakesspcaofny.

The Citizen photographer Kevin Rivoli can be reached at kevin.rivoli@lee.net.

GOVERNMENT

Legislators push back on possible job cuts

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Cayuga County legislators on Thursday scrutinized some of the job cuts in the proposed \$198 million 2026 budget, which would increase the property tax levy by 12.5% and slash nearly 30 positions.

The cuts would include \$67,000 for security at 63 Genesee St., the building in downtown Auburn that the county is renting for the Department of Social Services. Legislator Heidi Nightengale, D-Auburn, learned that the budget would reduce the number of security guards at the building from three to two.

The potential change concerns Nightengale, who noted a serious incident recently occurred at

that office.

"If you take one away, then you'll have many periods of time when you have just one person at the front," she said at the Legislature's Ways and Means Committee meeting.

Nightengale plans to introduce an amendment to restore the funding, but she has not determined whether the money will come from increasing the property tax levy or drawing it from the dwindling fund balance.

The tentative budget would also eliminate one aging services specialist from the Cayuga County Office for the Aging and replace it with a part-time position. Legislator Aileen McNabb-Coleman, D-Sennett, wants to restore the full-time

position.

Brenda Wiemann, director of the county Office for the Aging, is disappointed the tentative budget does not increase the line item for meals. The proposal for 2026 would keep the funding for meals at \$520,000, despite a 43% increase in food costs and more people using the service.

Wiemann explained the agency received an additional \$225,000 from the state, which could've increased the services it provides to older residents. However, with the county's tentative budget, it will likely offset cuts to local funding.

"It is disappointing to have the state give us all that extra money and it's invisible," Wiemann said. "It will have absolutely no pos-

itive impact on Cayuga County seniors."

Cayuga County Clerk-elect Kristine Lytle attended the meeting to critique how the budget plan would affect her office, namely the Department of Motor Vehicles.. The proposal would eliminate a senior cashier, making it the third DMV position slashed in two years.

Lytle also panned the DMV revenue projection, which is \$630,000 in the 2026 tentative budget.

"We can't keep our staff going the way it is," she said. "This office is struggling."

Another position that would be cut from the office is a deputy

Please see **BUDGET**, Page A2

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