



BARBALUNGA FOR SHERIFF

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“Time For Change – Justice That Works”

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BARBALUNGA PLANS TO COMMIT TO FULLY OPERATING A BERKSHIRE COUNTY REGIONAL LOCKUP AND PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALISTS FOR 911 EMERGENCIES

Berkshire County—Alf Barbalunga, a Democratic candidate for Berkshire County Sheriff, says that after speaking with local Police Departments in Berkshire County, he has learned that the “regional lockup” offered by the sheriff in 2010 and publicized in 2014, around the same time female inmates were sent to Chicopee, is usually not available when needed to local police departments, including Pittsfield.

“Local police personnel have told me they want a regional lockup because they don’t have the staffing and/or space to hold prisoners overnight. One said that 12 years ago, the current sheriff committed to providing the regional lockup, and that now, they make calls but getting space is difficult. It’s like you need to call in a favor. I don’t understand; we are fully staffed at the levels we had when we had 400 inmates, and our jail is currently two-thirds empty. Clearly, there is plenty of room to host prisoners for our local police partners.”

In 2014, the Berkshire Eagle reported that **“a new prisoner lockup facility that serves several police departments in the region is saving them time, expense, liability and aggravation in caring for detainees, according to local law enforcement officials.”** However, local police, as well as staff, say it’s no longer being used as promised, which seems to be a pattern with this Sheriff and his Executive Leadership Team,” explains Barbalunga.

“Typically, the sheriff runs a press release and local media covers a new program or planned program and it looks wonderful, but often we are finding it falls apart. I don’t blame the sheriff for failures that are out of his control. Not all good ideas result in success, but the public never sees the lack of results. They only see the image the sheriff has initially created. That’s why he is concerned about my campaign. To me his image doesn’t matter, I am simply after the truth of the promised deliverables.”

“The sheriff said in the debate that he would like to provide a regional lockup, but he has limited staffing, so he can’t. He said the Speaker of the House would not help with additional funding. Those are his predictable and consistent excuses. I believe there is plenty of staff, and we have a new Speaker. I plan to revisit any funding shortfalls I cannot resolve in-house to improve upon or fully operate the regional lockup to support the 32 towns and cities in Berkshire County”, says Barbalunga. “It’s something that’s been on my mind for a long time, having seen the need, and given the sheriff had actually promised the lockup and hasn’t followed through, it only encourages me to find a better way to fulfill that commitment. I am opposed to and will not accept failure. I see this as a challenge. I think we can do better.”

“The sheriff after saying he can’t provide a regional lockup, then pivoted and said if he has the staffing, he does do a regional lockup in emergency situations, under state mandates for towns under 5000 people, and he says he does that consistently. Another example of the sheriff contradicting himself, in this case in less than a 30-minute duration. I plan to use Deputy Sheriffs to provide transport to pick up inmates from local police so these departments can focus on policing.”

Regarding mental health clinicians, Barbalunga says it’s just one more thing he can do for the community. “We saw with the tragic death of Miguel Estrella, that a mental health specialist who might have able to intervene was not available that night. I am not second guessing what happened that day. I wasn’t there, but going forward, I think it’s vitally important to be able to send a mental health specialist to deal with an emergency situation. We could save lives. Nationwide, experts have recognized that police officers can benefit from having a mental health clinician on the scene, specialists who have spent years dealing with the psychological issues with which the police are faced.”

“What happened in Pittsfield was tragic. No one wants to see it happen again. If we can provide a mental-health specialist on call 24/7 to attend to these specific cases on an as-needed basis, we could make a difference in our community. Mental health and substance use issues are on the rise, and officers need support as much as our community members need support. When people turn to 911 calls, which the sheriff’s office handles for most of the county, we want to be able to send out the best response and not ask our officers to intervene in situations that could turn dangerous without the psychological expertise on hand.”

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