

Now a matter for the DA

Gillen calls for 'criminal' probe of Alcott contract

BY JESSE COBURN
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Hempstead Town Supervisor Laura Gillen called on the Nassau County district attorney's office on Monday to "launch a criminal investigation" into a contract signed by a former town commissioner, and for the department's current commissioner to resign.

"The DA's office has agreed to take a look into the matter and has referred it to the office's public corruption unit," Gillen said.

Newsday reported on Saturday that Ana-Maria Hurtado, former commissioner of Hempstead's Department of Occupational Resources, signed a two-year contract in March 2017 with Alcott HR, a human resources



Laura Gillen called for Commissioner Gregory Becker to resign.

outsourcing company, to provide extra staff to the department.

Hurtado retired that July and became an Alcott employee four days later, according to the contract, payroll records and town officials. Scott Surkis and Edward Kenny, who retired from

the department in 2016, also now work as Alcott employees, Commissioner Gregory Becker said.

Miriam Sholder, a spokeswoman for the Nassau DA, said the office was "reviewing the allegations."

Gillen criticized the contract,

saying Monday it "was used to line the pockets of former employees performing the exact same back-office HR tasks and working in the exact same office that they were employed in when they worked for the town."

She also said Becker should resign for "gross mismanagement" and "ignoring multiple directives to bring the department in line with federal funding." The department is federally funded.

Becker did not respond to a request for comment.

Councilwoman Erin King Sweeney's on Sunday called for Hempstead's compliance officer and ethics counsel to investigate the Alcott contract.

Gillen, a Democrat, went further, calling on the rest of the town board to back her request for Becker's resignation.

King Sweeney, who leads the board's Republican majority, said she and councilmen Anthony D'Esposito, Dennis Dunne and Thomas Muscarella are waiting for the findings of any investi-

gations into the contract before they decide whether to call on Becker to resign. Councilman Bruce Blakeman and Senior Councilwoman Dorothy Goosby are away, King Sweeney said. Neither responded to requests for comment.

Gillen spokesman Mike Frichione said the supervisor cannot fire Becker, as the town board votes on all hiring and firing of town employees.

The town board is set to vote on Tuesday on extending the contract, which expires June 30, through August.

Gillen said she would vote against the extension and call for a public hearing on revising Hempstead's code to give the town board greater oversight over the department's budget and expenditures.

The department runs the HempsteadWorks Career Center, which provides counseling and training to local job seekers. Its contracts typically have not gone before the town board.

Study foresees shortages in LI workforce

BY JAMES T. MADORE
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A shortage of workers looms on Long Island as the number of people age 0 to 19 fell 7.5 percent in the past seven years, according to a new report.

The shrinking number of children and teenagers in Nassau and Suffolk counties will soon translate into fewer workers age 20 to 39 — which will have big consequences for employers and for the entire regional economy, the Long Island Association Research Institute said.

The decline means that encouraging more commuters from New York City to Island jobs will be critical to filling future hiring needs, the study concluded.

The institute, a division of Long Island's largest business group, found the number of 0 to 19-year-olds dropped from 742,132 in 2010 to 686,184 in 2017, the most recent available

WHERE 20-39-YEAR-OLDS WORK

Industry	2017 employment
■ Health care	59,014
■ Elementary schools	50,547
■ Construction	39,994
■ Restaurants/bars	36,735
■ Government/military	24,189

SOURCE: Long Island Association Research Institute Report based on U.S. Census data

data from the U.S. Census.

"Over the next 10 to 20 years, regional industries and institutions that either serve or depend on people between the ages of 20 and 39 will likely feel the effects of the 0-19 population decline," the study states. "People at these ages tend to buy homes and rent apart-

SHRINKING FUTURE WORKFORCE

	Total 2010	Percent of total population	Total 2017	Percent of total population
0-19 age group	742,132	26%	686,184	24%

ments, and are therefore likely to spend money in consumer and service markets."

LIA CEO Kevin Law said factors behind the Island's drop in births include people deciding to have fewer children and high housing costs. "Long Island is like the rest of America, only more so," he said on Monday.

Law and others said reverse commuters could help solve the forthcoming worker shortage.

Their number will increase with the Long Island Rail Road's third-track project from Floral Park to Hicksville and direct access to Grand Central Terminal, the study states.

Law also said Island resi-

dents should embrace more apartments in downtowns, workforce training and more child-care options to keep young people from leaving for other states and regions.

Another potential remedy is encouraging young people to enter the workforce who have stayed out because of disability, drug addiction or "the proliferation of low wage or dead-end jobs," Law said.

Among the industries that are heavily reliant on young workers, health care employs the most, the study said.

Northwell Health, the state's largest private-sector employer, is paying "close attention" to

the shrinking number of young people, said Joseph Moscola, chief people officer for the health care system.

He said Northwell is attempting to develop a pipeline of employees by introducing 11th and 12th graders to health care occupations through an annual competition and scholarships.

Fewer births is a more immediate challenge for businesses reliant on a teenage and college-age workers, such as tourism.

Kristen Jarnagin, CEO of the tourism promotion agency Discover Long Island, said, "A decreasing population of young workers in our region, coupled with many of our young residents choosing to leave Long Island due to affordability and a negative perception of our quality of life, limits our ability to welcome visitors and provides challenges to the thousands of small businesses who rely on our visitor economy."