
**LEWIS COUNTY BOARD OF LEGISLATORS
HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING
April 28, 2026**

Present:

Legislator Thomas Kalamas, Chair
Legislator Herbert Frost III, Vice Chair
Legislator Vincent Nortz
Legislator Michael Hanno
Legislator Barry Lyndaker

CALL TO ORDER

Legislator Kalamas called the meeting to order at 1:51 PM

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: Legislator Kalamas moved to approve the minutes of March 31, 2026, Human Services Committee meeting as submitted.

Motion seconded by Legislator Lyndaker and carried.

Vote: AYE – 5 NAY – 0 Recuse/Abstain - None

Advocate Drum

Presenter: *Dave Zembiec, Advocate Drum Chair*

Dave Zembiec from Advocate Drum provided an overview of the organization's role in supporting and strengthening Fort Drum and its impact on the regional economy.

Fort Drum remains a critical economic driver, generating approximately \$2.48 billion in total economic impact annually, including direct spending and secondary effects. The installation supports over 17,000 direct military and civilian jobs, along with an estimated 6,200 additional indirect jobs in the regional economy. In Lewis County alone, Fort Drum contributes approximately \$70.4 million in economic impact and supports hundreds of jobs. Regionally, nearly 20% of all jobs are tied directly or indirectly to Fort Drum.

Advocate Drum's primary mission is to protect Fort Drum from potential reductions or closure, including past involvement in Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) efforts. The organization

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has successfully led regional advocacy efforts, including a major 2015 initiative that helped prevent significant troop reductions.

Key initiatives highlighted include:

- Advocacy for infrastructure improvements such as Exit 48A, railhead expansion, and bridge construction to enhance military readiness and efficiency
- Support for housing development to improve quality of life for military families
- Collaboration with healthcare and education systems to meet the needs of Fort Drum personnel and families
- Securing federal and state funding for various base and community projects

Advocate Drum also promotes Fort Drum through statewide outreach, including “Fort Drum Day” in Albany, and supports recruitment efforts such as student engagement events.

Workforce development remains a priority, particularly in assisting transitioning soldiers (approximately 3,600 annually) and military spouses in finding employment. Efforts include improving professional licensing processes, creating transitional certifications (e.g., for teachers), and connecting employers with this skilled workforce.

The presentation also noted the successful selection of Fort Drum to host a Multi-Domain Task Force, adding approximately 1,500 troops and enhancing the installation’s strategic importance.

Overall, the organization emphasized Fort Drum’s vital role in the region’s economy, workforce, and community, and the continued need for coordinated advocacy and support initiatives.

Next Move NY

Presenter: Ben Cruz, Next Move NY Program Administrator

Ben Cruz, Program Administrator for Next Move New York, presented an overview of the initiative, which aims to strengthen New York State’s workforce by retaining military spouses, transitioning service members, and veterans.

He highlighted a key regional challenge: a growing workforce gap driven by an aging population, outmigration of young residents, and increasing workforce demand. Fort Drum was identified as a unique regional asset, with approximately 4,500 individuals (including 3,500 transitioning service members and 1,000 military spouses) entering the civilian workforce annually, representing a significant opportunity to fill this gap.

Next Move New York operates through partnerships with Advocate Drum, the Development Authority of the North Country, and Jefferson Community College. These collaborations

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support initiatives focused on community integration, workforce development, and education/training.

Key program components include:

- “Live Love Stay” initiative to encourage military families to remain in the region
- Career Connect, Veterans Ambassador, and Employee Incentive programs to support workforce placement and retention
- Education and training programs through Jefferson Community College

A central tool is the Job Matching Portal, a free online platform that connects employers with military-affiliated job seekers by matching skills and job opportunities, streamlining the hiring process for both parties.

A success story was shared demonstrating effective job placement of a transitioning service member into a local school district, highlighting the program’s ability to align workforce needs with available talent.

Cruz emphasized that other states actively recruit Fort Drum talent, underscoring the importance of retaining this workforce locally. He also noted that community support and quality of life are key factors influencing whether service members choose to remain in the region.

Overall, the program focuses on building a sustainable workforce pipeline while leveraging Fort Drum as a strategic asset for regional economic growth.

DRAFT RESOLUTIONS

Draft Resolution No. 1

Authorizing the creation of a Lewis County Health System Stabilization Reserve to support the financial stability of the Lewis County Health System. The reserve will be used to address unexpected financial needs, including deficits, intergovernmental transfer payments, and other liabilities. The County Treasurer is authorized to establish the reserve and make an initial transfer of \$1.5 million from the 2026 budget. Future funding additions require legislative approval, and withdrawals are permitted either through the approved annual budget or by separate legislative resolution.

Motion: Legislator Frost moved that this draft resolution be forwarded to the full Board of Legislators for action.

Motion was seconded by Legislator Nortz and carried.

Vote: AYE – 5 NAY – 0 Recuse/Abstain – None.

Draft Resolution No. 2

Authorizing an agreement between the Lewis County Public Health Agency and Beaver River Central School to provide preschool tuition-based special education services for children with disabilities, as required under New York State Education Law. The agreement will run from September 1, 2026 through August 31, 2027, with automatic annual renewals unless terminated with 90 days' notice. Costs will be based on state-approved rates and the number of children served.

Motion: Legislator Nortz moved that this draft resolution be forwarded to the full Board of Legislators for action.

Motion was seconded by Legislator Hanno and carried.

Vote: AYE – 5 NAY – 0 Recuse/Abstain – None .

Draft Resolution No. 3

Amending the Lewis County Compensation Plan to address staffing needs within the Sheriff's Office. It abolishes one full-time Chief Deputy position and one part-time Civil Clerk position and creates one full-time Jail Nurse position to improve medical staffing at the correctional facility and ensure compliance with state regulations. The change is cost-neutral and effective retroactively from February 27, 2026 through December 31, 2026.

Motion: Legislator Lyndaker moved that this draft resolution be forwarded to the full Board of Legislators for action.

Motion was seconded by Legislator Frost and carried.

Vote: AYE – 5 NAY – 0 Recuse/Abstain – None .

Draft Resolution No. 4

Authorizing the transfer of \$8,000 in Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funds from the Dislocated Workers program to the Adult program for Program Year 2025, covering the period July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2027, in accordance with guidance from the New York State Department of Labor.

Motion: Legislator Frost moved that this draft resolution be forwarded to the full Board of Legislators for action.

Motion was seconded by Legislator Nortz and carried.

Vote: AYE – 5 NAY – 0 Recuse/Abstain – None.

NEW BUSINESS

Legislator Kalamas reported Colonel Elizabeth Duque has been designated as the incoming Commander of the U.S. Army Medical Department Activity at Fort Drum. In July 2025 the Lewis County Board of Legislators adopted a resolution appointing Colonel Christina M. Buchner as an ex-officio member of the Lewis County General Hospital Board of Managers.

Following Colonel Buchner's departure, the Board of Managers now seeks to appoint the incoming commander to serve in this ex-officio capacity. At its meeting on March 25, 2026, the Board of Managers approved a motion recommending this appointment to the Board of Legislators.

Based on this information, a draft resolution has been prepared and distributed to the Human Services Committee for consideration.

Draft Resolution No. 5

Appointing Colonel Elizabeth Duque, Commander of the U.S. Army Medical Department Activity at Fort Drum, as an ex-officio, non-voting, advisory member to the Lewis County General Hospital Board of Managers, as recommended by the Board of Managers to support collaboration with Fort Drum and local military healthcare needs.

Motion: Legislator Nortz moved that this draft resolution be forwarded to the full Board of Legislators for action.

Motion was seconded by Legislator Hanno and carried.

Vote: AYE – 5 NAY – 0 Recuse/Abstain – None.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Committee, Legislator Nortz moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:32 PM, seconded by Legislator Hanno and carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Cassandra Moser
Clerk of the Board