

# Official

From A1

Roanhouse, who describes Hincz as a personal friend, said the Town of Waterford representative will be allowed to remain in office and to continue collecting a nearly \$600-a-month county salary until his term expires next April.

"Taking action to remove any supervisor is an extreme measure," Roanhouse said. "We believe this situation will resolve itself in due time."

Contacted at his home, Hincz declined to discuss the illness that he says is keeping him from County Board meetings. He then denied missing meetings and expressed doubt that any constituents are dissatisfied with his attendance record.

Declining to comment further, he said, "I'm not talking to you any more. I think you need to step down from your job, how's that?"

Hincz, now midway through his fifth term in county government, represents County Board District 19, which includes all of the Town of Waterford and part of the Village of Rochester. He is chairman of the board's Economic Development & Land Use Committee, although records show he has not attended a committee meeting since August.

In the past two years, he has missed County Board votes on a new labor contract with sheriff's deputies, spending of federal COVID-19 relief funds, violent crime reduction efforts, hazardous materials emergency readiness, a contract with a county auditor, \$13 million in new borrowing, and the county's annual budget.

His growing record of absenteeism is fueling complaints that District 19 needs new representation.

Robert Ulander, a member of the Waterford Town Board, said while he is sympathetic toward

Hincz's health problems, he said the county supervisor should resign if he cannot attend meetings.

Ulander said participating in important deliberations and decisions over the telephone is not adequate.

"There's nobody sitting in that chair for us," he said. "Somebody else needs to take over that job."

Tanya Maney, a town activist and former director of the business group called Explore Waterford, said she has lodged a complaint with county officials about Hincz's absenteeism.

Everyone wishes Hincz a recovery from any health problems, Maney said. But she called it "ridiculous" that his district is going unrepresented on important county business.

"This is unacceptable for any government agency to even allow this," she said.

Another town resident, Paul Sucharski, said he could understand state or federal elected officials struggling occasionally to travel to meetings in Madison or Washington, D.C. County government, on the other hand, is conducted a short distance from just about anyone's home in the county, he said.

Hincz should resign if he cannot manage a short drive to represent his constituents at meetings, Sucharski said, adding, "I can't imagine that he's in the game like he should be."

County supervisors serve two-year terms and receive taxpayer-funded salaries of \$7,000 a year. Hincz was re-elected without opposition in April 2022 for a term that continues until April 2024.

With 21 supervisors representing the county's 197,000 residents, each supervisor has a constituency of about 9,400 people.

The County Board meets twice a month in the County Board Chambers at 14200 Washington

Ave. in Yorkville, about 20 miles from Hincz's home. Hincz frequently requests county mileage reimbursement of \$20 to \$25 per meeting when he travels from home to attend a board meeting.

Records show that one such reimbursement for \$22 was paid for a board meeting on June 28, 2022, although Hincz was absent from that meeting.

County spokesman Andrew Goetz said the \$22 payment was an error, and that the county would ask Hincz to return it.

"It appears to have been an oversight," Goetz said. "We are actively working to rectify this situation."

Along with his county supervisor duties, Hincz previously served as Waterford town chairman. He decided not to seek re-election as chairman this year after 10 years in town government.

The decision to give up the town chairmanship followed public questions raised late last year about his absences at both county and town meetings, including some Town Board meetings in which he attempted to participate via telephone.

He has since registered "virtual" attendance by participating over the telephone at eight County Board meetings, including the past seven in a row, going back to Feb. 14.

The most recent County Board meeting that he attended in person was on June 14, 2022.

Electronic attendance became popular in government meetings and elsewhere starting in 2020 as a way of controlling the spread of illness during the COVID-19 pandemic. The county passed rules permitting county supervisors to attend up to four meetings a year in that manner.

Anything more than four meetings — for the board or any committee — requires an exception approved by Roanhouse, as board

chairman, based on a supervisor's "showing of good cause," such as an illness or other emergency.

In addition to eight County Board meetings, Hincz this year has recorded "virtual" electronic attendance at three Executive Committee meetings and one Public Works, Parks and Facilities Committee meeting.

Roanhouse said he granted Hincz an exception for electronic attendance as allowed under the rules. Asked what the Town of Waterford representative provided as a "showing of good cause," Roanhouse said, "He wishes to participate."

Constituents in District 19 offer varied opinions on whether Hincz can effectively represent them by attending board meetings over the telephone.

Waterford Town Chairwoman Teri Jendusa Nicolai cited Hincz's poor health and said she is content with allowing him to serve out his term in county government. Nicolai said she has no objections to him attending county meetings via telephone.

"If it shows that he's attending and the County Board is satisfied," she said, "then I think it's okay."

Ulander and Maney both disagreed, saying that attending board meetings by telephone is unsatisfactory because technological limitations make it difficult to be a full participant in those meetings.

Recalling past town meetings in which Hincz participated electronically, Maney said the results were "a mess" of technical glitches and miscommunications.

"That is not giving us full representation," she said.

At the most recent County Board meeting, Hincz was not present May 9 for County Executive Jonathan Delagrave's annual "State of the County" address. During the roll call at the beginning of the meeting, County Clerk

Wendy Christensen announced that Hincz had tried dialing in by telephone, but that his connection apparently was lost.

Christensen later said Hincz was using a different phone than she thought, and that he could not communicate with her temporarily because he was having trouble unmuting his phone.

It was the 22nd board meeting in a row that Hincz failed to attend in person.

County Board colleagues have expressed concern about Hincz's attendance record. However, some also voice reluctance to question the Waterford representative, especially considering the questions about his health.

Supervisor Don Trottier of Racine likened the situation to that of U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., whose ailing health has led some in the nation's capital to suggest that she should resign.

Trottier said he has thought, too, about Hincz's absenteeism, although he would not go into detail.

"When people have issues personally," Trottier said, "we have to examine those."

The County Board can remove any supervisor for cause by a two-thirds vote — meaning that 14 board members would have to support removal.

Supervisor Ed Chart of Rochester, whose district borders Hincz's district, said he has noticed Hincz making an effort to improve his attendance by phoning in for meetings.

Chart also serves as Rochester town chairman, representing part of Hincz's county district. He would not say whether Hincz's constituents are getting adequate representation in county government.

"I'm not going to say bad things about him, because I think he's a good man," Chart said. "I think he's doing all he can."