

**Welfare to Work Commission
Of the Suffolk County Legislature**

Minutes of the April 21, 2017 Meeting

Present:

Richard Koubek, Chair
Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair
Commissioner John O'Neill (Suffolk County Department of Social Services)
Ayesha Alleyne (Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corporation)
Peggy Boyd (Family Service League)
Christiana DeLisi (Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory)
Barbara Egloff (Eastern Suffolk BOCES)
Charles Fox (EOC-LI)
Don Friedman (Empire Justice Center)
Kim Gierasch (Suffolk County Department of Health)
Michael Haynes (LI Cares/Harry Chapin Food Bank)
Ellen Krakow (Nassau/Suffolk Law Services)
Richard Krebs, SC Department of Labor
Christian Liambach (SC Association of Municipal Employees)
Lisa Pinkard for Legislator Monica Martinez
Jeffrey Reynolds (Family and Children's Association/LICADD);
Donna Teicher for Jeffrey Reynolds (Family and Children's Association/LICADD)

Excused:

Sr. Lisa Bergeron (Catholic Charities); Greta Guarton (LI Coalition for the Homeless); Nina Leonhard (Suffolk County Community College); Rachel Seiler (Community Development Corporation of LI); Michael Stoltz (Association for Mental health and Wellness)
Luis Valenzuela (LI Council of Churches)

Guest: Lauren Laurore, LICADD

1. **Minutes:** Chair Richard Koubek reminded the Commission that snow storms interfered with the February meeting (at which there was no quorum since it was the day after the blizzard) and March when the meeting was cancelled due to snow. The January minutes were approved unanimously on a motion by Kathy Liguori, seconded by Don Friedman. The February minutes were approved unanimously on a motion by Christina DeLisi, seconded by Charles Fox.
2. **Suffolk Bus Cuts:** Mr. Koubek reported Suffolk received only \$600,000 in additional State funding for bus service which is insufficient to restore the ten lines that had been cut. The County had sought \$10 million in additional funding. The Department of Public Works has contracted \$125,000 for a consulting firm to conduct a ridership survey that might lead to improved service. The results are due in the summer. The County has also created an oversight board for the bus system that includes riders and advocates.
3. **Supportive Housing Work Group:** Mr. Koubek provided the Commission with minutes of the March 28th meeting at which DSS services for the homeless were outlined and discussed. Ms. Liguori praised the housing unit for the clarity of their report and for their quality programs. The presentation was within the context of Suffolk County's serious lack of affordable rental housing for low-income people. Among the key points:

- a. DSS has twice received approval from New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) to increase the \$503 monthly rental supplement to \$1258 for a family of four. When the \$250 PA cash grant for shelter is applied, the supplement is \$1508 for a family of four, which is approaching the HUD Fair Market Rental of \$1533 for a family of four for a one bedroom apartment. The supplement applies to families with children and certain childless families but not to individuals. There was consensus that in Suffolk's high-rent market, this amount still falls short of the \$1878 Fair Market Rental for a two-bedroom apartment that would be needed for a family of four.
 - b. The DSS income cap sometimes serves as a disincentive to work since, once a family achieves stable, permanent DSS housing which they can lose if they exceed the cap, they choose lower wages or not working as an alternative to losing their housing.
 - c. DSS mandated sanctions can add to the pressures faced by homeless families since DSS cannot pay a client's rent if he or she has been sanctioned. This is a special problem with people who have undiagnosed mental-health challenges, which might cause them to be sanctioned.
 - d. There has been a 450 percent increase in hospital discharges of homeless people with mental and physical disorders since 2013. These discharges are often premature and place an enormous burden on the DSS housing unit. Shelter providers, for example, often refuse to accept these discharged patients who have multiple diagnoses and behavioral problems. Effective May 1st, shelter providers who receive Continuum of Care funds will be required to accept any homeless applicant, regardless of diagnoses.
 - e. There are problems finding supportive housing for people who have both mental health and substance dependency challenges since they tend to be passed back and forth between supportive housing provided by the New York State Office of Mental Health Services (OMH) and housing provided by the New York State Office of Substance Abuse Services (OASAS). The problem of OASS not regulating sober homes was again raised. The next meeting of the Work Group will be with both OMH and OASAS staff. In addition, a joint meeting of the Welfare to Work Commission and the Suffolk Sober Homes Oversight Board will be arranged in the coming months.
 - f. The lack of affordable housing for low income people in Suffolk County is amplified by the fact that of the 540 homeless families currently in DSS shelters, 285 have some source of income other than PA, such as employment or Social Security. This is a 20 percent increase since 2013.
4. **Home Stability Support Report:** Don Friedman provided an overview of the proposed New York State Home Stability Support (HSS) proposal that failed to pass but garnered significant advocate and media support. Similar to the increased housing supplement secured by DSS, Mr. Friedman pointed out that there are a number of important differences between HSS and the increased Suffolk shelter supplement. The first key difference between Suffolk's supplement and HSS is that Suffolk's rent supplement is for families with children and certain "child-only" welfare households; HSS covers families and individuals. Unlike the Suffolk supplement, HSS benefits would not be terminated if someone in the household is sanctioned. HSS benefits could be provided for a period of five years, though the period can be extended for good cause; the Suffolk supplement does not appear to have a time limit. Perhaps the most significant difference is that HSS is designed to be paid for solely with State and federal funds, not County funds. Suffolk could thus opt into HSS and then expand their coverage to individuals without incurring additional costs. The key aspects of the HSS are:

- a. Home Stability Support would provide a statewide rent supplement for families and individuals who are eligible for PA, and who are facing eviction or homelessness, or a loss of housing due to domestic violence or hazardous housing conditions.
 - b. The amount of the supplement would be sufficient to bring the person's total rent allotment up to 85% of regional HUD Fair Market Rent.
 - c. The grant would replace any existing supplements and would be fully paid for with state and federal funds
 - d. A separate allowance is provided for households that must pay for fuel for heating, equal to the amount of cost incurred
 - e. The rent and fuel for heating allowance are not affected by a household member's sanction status
 - f. As long as the household remains eligible for PA, these grants can be provided for up to five years, and can be extended for good cause.
 - g. If the household becomes ineligible for public assistance, they may continue to receive these grants as long as income does not exceed 200% of the FP, for up to one year.
 - h. Local districts are instructed to provide a range of case management services for homeless or at risk households.
5. **Child Care Commission May Summit:** Lisa Pinkard and Kathy Liguori reported that the Child Care Commission's summit will be held on May 12. The Child Care Commission has assembled a significant number of key elected officials, academics, providers and parents for this important summit. The May 12th Welfare to Work Commission meeting has been postponed until May 19th so that members can attend the child-care summit.
 6. **SWEP Educational Placements:** Richard Krebs announced that a tour of the One Stop Center for Commission members would be arranged for the June meeting. He also reported that an annual average of 345 of the 1200 non-exempt Temporary Assistance clients are in educational or training programs. Of these, 21 are attending Suffolk County Community College. Mr. Krebs pointed out that, following the decrease in PA enrollments since the 1990s, the clients who remain on PA are the most-difficult to serve and place, with multiple barriers to both education and employment. He noted that possible program cuts initiated by the Trump Administration might decrease the number of people in these programs. Mr. Koubek suggested that the Commission consider holding a public hearing in the fall to assess the impact of Trump Administration program reductions on Suffolk County.
 7. **2017 Commission Goals:** There ensued a final discussion of the 2017 goals which, following minor amendments, were adopted on a motion by Kathy Liguori, seconded by Charles Fox, Yes: 15; No:0; Abstentions: 2 (Commissioner O'Neill and Mr. Krebs). The goals are contained in the annual report appended below.
 8. **2017 Report to the Legislature:** The Commission unanimously approved the 2017 annual report, on a motion by Kathy Liguori, seconded by Ellen Krakow. The report is appended below.
 9. **Announcements:** Ayesha Alleyne announced that Wyandanch Homes and Property development Corporation is holding its annual luncheon reception on May 18th.
 10. **Next meeting:** May 19, 9:30AM at DOL

Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature

2016 Annual Report

And 2017 Goals

April 2017

As required by the 15th Resolve of Resolution No. 181-2003, the Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature is pleased to submit its annual report containing the Commission's goals for 2017 and a summary of its activities for 2016.

Welfare to Work Commission's 2017 Goals

1. Continue pursue these goals in the Commission's 2012 report, "Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County":
 - a. Review and make recommendations about staffing levels and access to services at the Suffolk County Department of Social Services (SCDSS), Suffolk County Department of Labor, Licensing and Consumer Affairs (SCDOLL&CA) and Suffolk County Department of Health (SCDOH).
 - b. Receive updates on the privatization of the County's health centers under Hudson River Health Care and its impact on the provision of health-care services in Suffolk County.
 - c. Monitor Suffolk bus service as it relates to the needs of poor and near-poor people.
 - d. Create a scoring tool to measure supports provided to working-poor people by companies seeking a Suffolk County IDA benefit.
2. Continue to pursue recommendations in the 2014 Commission report, "Who's Minding the Kids? Meeting Challenges and Creating Opportunities for Quality Child Care and Early Learning in Suffolk County," with special attention to supporting increased State funding for child care while continuing to address inequities in Suffolk's State Child Care Block Grant (CCBG) allocation due to the inadequate CCBG formula used by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS.)
3. Continue to plan, implement and evaluate a pilot for expanding on-site educational and work opportunities for work-eligible TANF and Safety Net (SN) SWEP clients at Suffolk County Community College toward the goal of creating SCDSS and SCDOLL&CA "hub centers" for the delivery of multiple SWEP services, including work experience, education, training and child care.
4. Monitor changes in federal TANF law and policy that may be implemented by the Trump Administration with special attention to education and training opportunities for SWEP clients.
5. Continue supporting adoption and refinement of Suffolk County and SCDSS "Americans with Disabilities Act" (ADA) policies and procedures. In addition:
 - a. Clarify and monitor the status of the nonprofit liaison communication lines crafted in 2012 by the Commission's Employment Assessment Committee in cooperation with SCDSS and SCDOLL&CA.
6. Explore barriers to housing for Suffolk residents with behavioral health challenges and release a report to the Suffolk County Legislature on this topic.
7. Assess the impact of the opioid epidemic on communities/people of lower socioeconomic status with special attention to the effects on children and young people.

Activities Pursuant to the Commission's 2016 Goals

Pursue Recommendations in the “Struggling in Suburbia” Report

The Commission continued to pursue these recommendations in our 2012 poverty report, “Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County,”

1. ***Expand educational opportunities for SWEP clients.*** The Commission pursued this poverty-report goal through the work of its Ad Hoc Suffolk Community College (SCCC) Committee. Due to previous efforts by the Commission, the Suffolk County Department of Social Services (SCDSS) and Suffolk County Department of Labor, Licensing and Consumer Affairs (SCDOLL&CA), opportunities have been created for Suffolk Works Employment Program (SWEP) clients to attend SCCC while they are also fulfilling their work requirement at SCCC. The Ad Hoc Committee expanded this program along with the concept of creating an “SWEP Hub” at SCCC with expanded delivery of multiple services such as work experience, vocational and job training and child care. A pilot for this expanded program was launched in the spring of 2015 and was continued into the Spring and Fall semesters of 2016. The pilot will continue to be monitored in 2017.
2. ***Recommendations about staffing levels at the SCDSS and SCDOLL&CA.*** The Commission’s poverty report highlighted the need for appropriate staffing at SCDSS and SCDOLL&CA. Following release of County Executive Bellone’s 2017 budget, the Commission consulted with SCDSS and SCDOLL&CA as well as with the Legislature’s Budget Review Office and found that proposed staffing levels were inadequate for SCDSS in the proposed budget due to a \$1.5 million reduction. This reduction was considered especially burdensome since it would have resulted in the eligibility for subsidized child care being reduced from 125 percent to 100 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). The Commission therefore voted to send a letter to the Suffolk County Legislature calling for a restoration of the \$1.5 for SCDSS as well as restoration of Public Health Nurses and elimination of a 1 percent administrative fee for County contracts. Each of these recommendations was adopted by the Legislature in the 2017 budget.
3. ***Monitor the privatization of the County’s health centers.*** The Commission periodically received updates from SCDOH on the status of the County health centers, which were found to be providing adequate services.
4. ***Monitor Suffolk bus service as it relates to the needs of poor and near-poor people.*** The Commission’s poverty report emphasized the need for expanded bus service. Upon learning that the proposed 2017 County budget would eliminate 8 bus lines, the Commission sent a letter to the Legislature in September and again in October requesting that the reductions be delayed until a demographic study of riders as well as a rerouting plan be published. The bus line eliminations went into effect in December of 2016. The Commission will monitor their impact throughout 2017 while calling for more State transportation funding for Suffolk County.
5. ***Score IDA applicants on their supports for working-poor people.*** In 2014, the Commission drafted a scoring tool that the IDA could use to assess applications for IDA grants. The scoring tool included such categories as: hiring union workers, minority contractors and local workers; paying the County living wage; prioritizing economically-stressed communities; providing child-care assistance to workers; providing on-the-job training; hiring Public Assistance recipients and long-term unemployed workers. It is the Commission’s hope that this scoring tool might provide a model for all IDAs to use in Suffolk County and would thereby raise the standard for IDA grants at both the town and County levels. The tool will be submitted to the IDA in 2017.

Child Care

1. **Child Care Commission:** The Welfare to Work Commission holds a seat on the Suffolk County Child Care Commission and receives monthly reports of its activities. The Child Care Commission is planning a summit for May of 2017. Commission members Richard Koubek and Kathy Liguori are participating in the planning of this summit.
2. **CCBG Formula:** The Commission continued to assess the State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) Child Care Block Grant (CCBG) formula that has underfunded Suffolk County child care since 2008.
 - a. **The inadequate CCBG formula:** In December the Commission heard a report by Jennifer Rojas of the Child Care Council of Suffolk. Ms. Rojas stated that the State formula for allocating Federal CCBG funds has not adequately met the child-care needs of Suffolk County residents who live at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Current Suffolk County eligibility for the CCBG subsidy is at 125% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), which is one of the lower rates in the State. Except for families of children with special needs, a family of four would have to earn \$30,375 or less to qualify for the subsidy, which is well below the recommended eligibility of 200% of FPL. As the Commission, DSS, the County Executive and Legislature have stated over the years, Ms. Rojas reiterated that the New York State Office of Family and Children's Services (OCFS) uses an inadequate formula based on a five-year lookback at past spending rather than at need (e.g. share of young children in families earning under 200% of FPL) as is done by the Federal government.
 - b. **State Special Incentive Fund proposal:** Ms. Rojas presented a proposal for a State Special Incentive Fund under which the State would create a temporary two year Special Incentive Fund of approximately \$5 million a year for the six large counties – Suffolk being one - unable to meet the needs of child-care families of low-income working families earning less than 200% of FPL. These counties must have populations in excess of 450,000 and have experienced a positive population growth rate of at least 1% based on census data. Under this proposal the Special Incentive Fund also would count in the NYS OCFS allocation methodology, which will help counties sustain the necessary funding without the Special Incentive Fund going forward. The Commission voted to support this proposal in a letter to Governor Andrew Cuomo. Subsequently, each member of the Suffolk County Legislature signed a letter of support to the Governor as well. This proposal will be monitored during the 2017 State legislative session.

ADA Policies

Discussions for a County ADA policy moved from the Welfare to Work Commission to the County Executive's offices in 2015. A draft County ADA policy has been developed and is being negotiated by interested parties. The Commission will monitor these discussions throughout 2017.

Child Support

In 2014, the Commission took up the issue federal and State child-support regulations that sometimes are disincentives for SCDOLL&CA clients to work, or even serve as parents. In 2015, the Commission's Ad Hoc Child Support Committee discussed strategies to make the Child Care regulations more flexible and responsive to clients' needs. In March of 2016, SCDSS staff from the Child Support Unit met with the Commission and announced that, on a case-by-case basis, SCDSS can discuss the possibility of reducing SCDSS arrears with any low-income, non-custodial parent (NCP). It was reported that this outreach has produced a 41% success rate and that over \$300,000 in adjustments to NCP arrears payments have been made. These adjustments include

reducing DSS arrears, lowering the monthly payments and extending the payment period so that the payments are less burdensome by being spread over time. SCDSS staff also agreed to offer a grace period before the arrears payments begin once an NCP has found work or offering a period of time in which no interest is accrued with payments applied solely to the interest arrears principal. The Commission was informed that Suffolk County DSS has one of the highest child-support collection rates in New York State.

Supportive Housing Work Group

In the fall of 2015, the Commission revisited its 2007 report on the lack of affordable housing in Suffolk County, noting that little has been accomplished providing safe, affordable housing for very-low income residents earning under 50% of the Area Median Income. This housing vacuum was found to be especially onerous for people with behavioral health challenges, especially those who are chronically homeless. The Commission created a Supportive Housing Work Group that met with stakeholders throughout 2016. Among the topics covered by the Work group were:

1. Identifying the unserved and underserved homeless population.
2. Profiling the chronically homeless population.
3. Exploring the Continuum of Care network of services for the homeless.
4. Assessing the “Housing First” model for sheltering homeless people.
5. Assessing the SPOA system for providing housing to people with behavioral health challenges.
6. Identifying innovative programs to serve the homeless, including: Community Housing Innovations’ “Transitional Housing Program”; Family Service League’s “TLC Emergency Housing Program”; Concern for Independent Living housing options; tiny homes.

The Supportive Housing Work Group will continue to meet in 2017 with the goal of releasing a report, with recommendations, to the Suffolk County Legislature.

Conclusion

The Commission meets monthly, always with a quorum, and has created several committees that also meet to pursue issues such as the Supportive Housing Work Group. We look forward to working with the Legislature, SCDSS, SCDOLL&CA and SCDOH in 2017 to continue our mission to “evaluate and make recommendations of federal, State and county policies and procedures to move people from welfare to work.”