

**Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature
Minutes of the December 16, 2016 Meeting**

Present: Richard Koubek, Chair; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair; Lisa Pinkard for Legislator Monica Martinez; Christina DeLisi; Dennis Nowak for DSS Commissioner John O'Neill; Luis Valenzuela; Don Friedman; Ayesha Alleyne; Nina Leonhard; Michael Haynes; Richard Krebs; Ellen Krakow; Kim Gierasch; Rachel Seiler; Donna Teichner for Jeffrey Reynolds

Excused: Michael Stoltz; Peggy Boyd; Sr. Lisa Bergeron; Charles Fox; Barbara Egloff; Michele O'Connell; Charles Fox

1. **Minutes:** The minutes of the November meeting were approved unanimously on a motion by Ellen Krakow, seconded by Don Friedman
2. **New Commission Members:** Chair Richard Koubek announced that he learned on December 12th that the resolution to revise the membership of the Commission passed the Legislature and was signed by the County Executive on November 29th. He welcomed Rachel Seiler who will represent the Community Development Corporation of Long Island and Donna Teichner who was filling in at this meeting for Dr. Jeffrey Reynolds who will represent Family and Children's Association/LICADD. Greta Guarton from the Long Island Coalition for the Homeless was unable to attend or send a representative to the December 16th meeting but will have representation at the January meeting.
3. **Child Care Commission:** Kathy Liguori reported that plans are underway in the Child Care Commission for the for the May child care summit as well as a film screening on U.S. child care compared with other developed countries which will be held at Suffolk Community College on March 5. Mr. Koubek reiterated that the Welfare to Work Commission will take primary responsibility for child care for poor families earning under 200 % of the Federal poverty Level whereas the new Child Care Commission will look at the entire child-care field, regardless of family income status.
4. **Proposal for a State Child-Care Subsidy Special Incentive Fund.** Mr. Koubek introduced Jennifer Rojas of the Child Care Council of Suffolk for a Power Point presentation on the Child Care Block Grant (CCBG). 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 a flawed 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.
 - a. **Analysis of Large Counties:** Ms. Rojas noted that the six largest counties in the State outside of New York City have relatively high median incomes but pockets of poverty, and their CCBG allocations are not reflective of their population trends. She provided data showing that, between 2007 and 2015, the percent of children under the age of six who live below the FPL has increased in Suffolk from 16.8% to 25.5%.

She also showed that between 2010 and 2015, while Suffolk's overall population grew by 6.2% its CCBG increased by only 1.4%. Meanwhile, Nassau County's populations decreased by .5% while their CCBG allocation increased by 33.8%. Erie County's population decreased by 5.4% while their CCBG allocation increased by 5.4%

- b. **Application of Suffolk of the State FFFS to Child Care in 2016:** Ms. Rojas noted that in 2016, DSS applied \$400,000 from its State Flexible Fund for Family Services (FFFS) to child care. Mr. Koubek welcomed this news since in 2015 DSS was utilizing FFFS funds for other purposes. Ms. Liguori also welcomed the FFFS news but stated that this shift was not an added increase to the Suffolk County budget and therefore the County also needs to increase funding for child care from County revenues. Mr. Nowak maintained that the County's increase in funding to child care was not just a shift in funding but was made with funds previously allocated to Adult Protective Services (APS) and Domestic Violence (DV) services that the County then had to cover with other revenues outside of FFFS. He further noted that APS and DV services have been stable year-to-year and that there are more caseworkers in APS now than at this time last year.
- c. **State Special Incentive Fund:** Ms. Rojas then described a proposal to help large counties reach 200% of the FPL. Under this proposal the State would create a **temporary two year** Special Incentive Fund of approximately \$5 million a year for the six large counties 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.
- d. **Avoiding CCBG Penalties:** Mr. Koubek stated that not penalizing the County for using the Special Incentive Fund is very important since Suffolk was penalized during the Great Recession for applying Federal stimulus funds to child care. In so doing, Suffolk added many children to the child-care subsidy rolls while it carried over its State CCBG funding to the following years, thereby resulting in OCFS reducing Suffolk's CCBG grant, arguing that it was not fully utilized due to the application of the Federal stimulus funds to child care. Dennis Nowak, who heads children's services for DSS, stated that Suffolk is still being penalized for its decision to use the Federal stimulus funds and for carrying over its CCBG funds, even though OCFS allows up to a 15% rollover of the CCBG year-to-year to ensure funding and caseload stability. In addition, Mr. Koubek pointed out and OCFS sent a memorandum giving counties permission to apply the Federal stimulus funds to child care. Mr. Koubek again reiterated that his conversation with Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan's staff back in March yielded no support for the argument that Suffolk has been underfunded by the State CCBG formula.
- e. **Actions:** Mr. Koubek thanked Ms. Rojas for this very cogent presentation. He stated that the Commission would likely add adoption of the State Special Incentive Fund to its 2017 priorities. He asked Ms. Rojas for a draft letter, either to the Legislature or to State officials, which the Commission might send supporting the Special incentive

- Fund. The Commission will take up this letter at the January 13th meeting. Ms. Rojas agreed to provide a draft. She also stated that she has already met with Legislator Monica Martinez who offered her assistance bringing her legislative colleagues on board.
5. **Supportive Housing Work Group:** Mr. Koubek stated that the Work Group will convene on January 6th to: (1) decide if other stakeholders need to be heard from and (2) begin deliberations on recommendations.
 6. **Welfare to Work 2017 Priorities:** Mr. Koubek stated that the Commission's 2017 priorities would be discussed in depth at the January 13th meeting. He asked Dennis Nowak to provide an overview of DSS priorities for 2017 which might be meshed with the Commission's priorities.
 - a. Mr. Nowak stated that, due to the restoration of child-care funding in the 2017 County budget there will be no reduction in child-care eligibility as the Department continues to advocate to increase/maintain CCBG funds.
 - b. Mr. Nowak reported that the Department will also work toward meeting all mandated key performance metrics, but due to limited resources and staffing, will focus on a few new strategic initiatives and technological management efficiencies such as the use of iPads by Child Protective Services workers.
 - c. Mr. Nowak also noted a disturbing rise of 3% in 2016 Child Protective Services (CPS) reports that may be linked to the suburban opiate crisis. Ms. Liguori again stated that children whose parents are opiate addicted should be a Commission 2017 priority as well as treatment programs for their parents.
 - d. Mr. Nowak stated that as a result of increased intake and fewer onboard staff, CPS workers are averaging 19 investigations per worker rather than the recommended 12 per CPS worker. Ongoing service delivery to support children and families in open CPS cases has remained stable at 1,200-1,300 cases. Nevertheless, he stated that DSS has reduced the number of foster children from 720 to 587 – a record low – mainly as a result of reduced foster care placements and increased adoptions due to a streamlined adoption workflow process.
 - e. Donald Friedman stated that little has been accomplished under the Obama Administration in securing more Federal flexibility with SWEP clients, such as expanding education and training opportunities. He noted that this situation would likely worsen under the Trump Administration. Mr. Koubek noted that this issue might also need to be a Commission 2017 priority.
 7. **SCCC Pilot:** Nina Leonhardt reported that due to a retirement in the SCCC Career Services Office, the placements in the child-care portion of the pilot slowed in the fall semester. Richard Krebs noted that 21 SWEP clients are now attending SCCC and 14 SWEP clients are also fulfilling their work requirement at the college.
 8. **Next meeting:** The Commission reached consensus to continue meeting on the second Friday of each month, 9:30-11:30 AM. The next meeting will be **Friday, January 13th**.