

**Welfare to Work Commission  
Of the Suffolk County Legislature  
Minutes of the January 8, 2016 Meeting**

**Present:** Richard Koubek, Chair; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair; Tom Grecco for Olga Ayala; Lisa Pinkard for Leg. Monica Martinez; Luis Valenzuela; Melinda Seiferth for Mike Stoltz; Ellen Krakow; Richard Krebs; Charles Fox; Mike Haynes; Ayesha Alleyne; Nina Leonhardt; Valerie Smith; Peggy Boyd; Lisa Gans for Steve Chassman

**Excused:** Don Friedman; Ray O'Rourke; Kimberly Gierasch; Barbara Egloff; Christina Maher; Sr. Lisa Bergeron

**Guest:** Ralph Fasano, Executive Director, Concern for Independent Living

1. **Minutes:** The minutes of the December meeting were approved unanimously, on a motion by Kathy Liguori, seconded by Ellen Krakow.
2. **SCCC "I Promote" Proposal:** Nina Leonhardt described a new Suffolk County Community College grant proposal being submitted to the State University of New York that would expand opportunities for the NYS Department of Labor (NYSDOL) to host collaborative career fairs on SCCC campuses, access to NYSDOL electronic systems for job seekers, provide some career-service computer labs as well as individualized and small-group job readiness assistance. Following the presentation and discussion of the proposal, Kathy Liguori moved and Mike Haynes seconded a motion to send the letter appended below supporting this grant request. The motion passed unanimously.
3. **Child Care Commission:** Child Care Committee Chair Kathy Liguori reported that she, Mr. Koubek, and the new Deputy DSS Commission for Child Care, Dana Friedman, will meet with Legislator Monica Martinez on January 11<sup>th</sup> to discuss the resolution and opportunities for the new commission to coordinate County legislative and executive actions on child care. Lisa Pinkard announced that the child-care resolution was laid on the table on January 4<sup>th</sup> and will be taken up at the next committee on a date in February that has not yet been scheduled.
4. **DSS Request for GED Waiver.** Tom Grecco, Division Administrator of the SCDSS Client Benefits Division, distributed a letter DSS Commissioner John O'Neill sent to Barbara Quinn, Director of Employment and Advancement Services of the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Services (OTDA) on January 5<sup>th</sup>. The letter, based on a federal Department of Human Services 2012 memo encouraging states to consider new, more effective ways of reaching TANF goals, requests a SCDSS waiver to federal employment program regulations so that pursuit of a General Educational Development (GED) diploma by SWEP clients can be counted as a "core" employment activity and categorized under "vocational education" and therefore, subject to the 12 month lifetime limit. This would be accomplished under New York State's Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC) high school equivalency test which is now the primary pathway in New York to earn a NYS High School Equivalency Diploma. Several members of the Commission commended DSS for pursuing this waiver. Mr. Grecco stated that ideally, DOL staff and SWEP clients should collaborate and select from a menu of work and educational activities tailored to promoting self-sufficiency for the individual." SWEP activities. Ellen Krakow noted that such a holistic approach to SWEP would be of great benefit to clients. Chair Richard Koubek stated that

expanding educational opportunities for SWEP clients has been a long-standing priority for the Commission and will likely be so again in 2016. Nina Leonhardt moved and Kathy Liguori seconded a motion to draft a Commission letter supporting this DSS waiver request. The motion passed unanimously. Don Friedman will be asked to draft the letter which will be circulated for an electronic Commission vote. [Note: Mr. Friedman drafted the waiver letter appended below which was adopted by an electronic vote on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016: Yes – 16; No – 0; Abstentions – 0.]

5. **2016 Commission Priorities:** Mr. Koubek reminded the Commission that consensus had been reached at the December meeting to carry over a number of 2015 priorities into 2016. These carry-overs were appended to the agenda for the January 8<sup>th</sup> meeting. He stated that education will likely again be lifted up as a major priority in 2016, beginning with support of the SCDSS request for a waiver to count pursuit of GED as a core activity. The full package of priorities will be voted on at the February meeting.
6. **Supportive Housing Presentation:** Mr. Koubek reminded the Commission that affordable housing opportunities for Suffolk residents had been a 2015 priority. Several discussions of this issue led to a narrowing of the topic to housing opportunities for vulnerable populations, especially those with mental illness. He reiterated that this is a “teachable moment” since such supportive housing has been in the news in the past several months due to a rise in homelessness, with a major initiative introduced in New York City, indications that Governor Andrew Cuomo may lift up this issue in his State of the State Address and may propose additional funding for supportive housing in 2016. A recent Newsday editorial, which commended SCDSS for its initiatives to house homeless people, also referenced the need for more supportive housing. Mr. Koubek further stated that, at the December Commission meeting, it was decided that the January meeting focus on making supportive housing for vulnerable people a 2016 priority with the possibility of holding public hearings and releasing a report on this topic. He then introduced Ralph Fasano, Executive Director of Concern for Independent Living, for a presentation on the supportive housing options provided by his agency.
  - a. Mr. Fasano noted that Long Island currently has 3,787 units of supportive housing but, according to a survey by the Corporation for Supportive Housing, needs another 2,000 units. (Suffolk has approximately 2,200 units) He supported Mr. Koubek’s observation that this is a unique moment to be discussing this issue and that there is a possibility Governor Cuomo might call for funding an additional 1,000 supportive-housing units for Long Island.
  - b. Mr. Fasano provided a slide overview of Concern for Independent Living supportive-housing units on Long Island and in Brooklyn that include apartment complexes, condos and free-standing multi-family homes. Several Commission members commented on the attractive architectural styles of these residences, which blend into their neighborhoods. Mr. Fasano noted that the beautiful architectural styles and sound construction have overcome some of the local opposition to these multi-family residences which can be found in Amityville, Ronkonkoma and Middle Island.
  - c. Mr. Fasano stated that Concern for Independent Living residences often mix people with psychiatric and other disabilities – with residents from the

general population. The supportive housing residents, who are chosen based on their abilities to function in a self-sufficient manner, receive numerous supportive services including counseling and education. He stated that sound case management and building management practices have minimized relational problems between these two populations.

- d. There followed a discussion of Mr. Fasano's presentation. Mr. Grecco and Mindy Seifirth stated that mental-health institutions, the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) as well as local hospitals often release patients prematurely who still require medical and psychiatric after-care. These patients then are supposed to enter the shelter system but often become homeless due to gaps in the provider system. Peggy Boyd expressed concern about what she sees as too many mentally-ill people who are not receiving treatment or housing. Mr. Koubek noted that should the Commission conduct public hearings on this issue, they would likely raise questions about the efficacy of the deinstitutionalization movement begun in the 1970s that too often has failed to provide community based-services for mentally-ill people. Ms. Boyd stated that supportive housing should be viewed as a need for many vulnerable populations, not people with mental illness.. Mr. Fasano, Mr. Koubek and Ayesha Alleyne noted that there are not enough supportive housing programs like Concern for Independent Living and Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corporation for very-low income people as well as these suffering from mental illness.
  - e. With the Commission reaching consensus that supportive housing might be an important 2016 priority, a motion was made by Peggy Boyd, seconded by Kathy Liguori to "form an exploratory committee to consider 2016 Welfare to Work public hearings and a report on supportive housing." The motion passed: Yes (14); No (0); Abstentions (0). Mr. Koubek stated that should the Commission move forward with this priority, Long Island experts such as Mr. Fasano or Greta Guarton, Executive Director of the Long Island Coalition for the Homeless, would be asked to serve on the committee that oversees the hearings and report.
7. **Announcements:** Mr. Koubek announced that he and Aaron Watkins Lopez from Long Island jobs with justice have been invited to appear on the WLIW21/WNET broadcast, Long Island Business report, which will be taped on January 13<sup>th</sup>. The topic is bus transportation on Long Island. He has sent a copy of the Commission's poverty report to the producer and will be representing both the Commission and Jobs with Justice when he speaks during the program.
  8. **Next Meeting:** The next meeting will be on Friday, February 19<sup>th</sup>, 9:30AM, a date different from the usual meeting time of the second Friday of the month, since County offices will be closed for Lincoln's birthday on February 12<sup>th</sup>.

### **Commission Letter in Support of SCCC "I Promote" Grant Application**

To: Sylvia Camacho  
College Director, Career Services,  
Suffolk County Community College, S/C/205

533 College Rd, Selden NY 11784  
[631-451-4057](tel:631-451-4057)  
[camachs@sunysuffolk.edu](mailto:camachs@sunysuffolk.edu)

Dear Director Camacho,

The Suffolk County Legislature's Welfare to Work Commission voted today to endorse your proposal to the State University of New York, entitled I-PROMOTE (Integrating Programs and Resources for Outreach, Motivation and Engagement). The expanded collaboration between the State, County, and Community College departments and programs will benefit the residents of Suffolk County who need assistance with finding employment opportunities. The proposed program will provide increased career and educational opportunities for Suffolk residents receiving public assistance along with the working poor, populations of greatest concern to the Commission.

We understand that your proposal invites NYSDOL to each campus to deliver services and host collaborative career fairs to students and county residents, allowing your constituents to access NYSDOL's Jobs Express and Job Zone electronic employment assistance systems. These services will be available at the Riverhead, Selden, and Brentwood college campuses as well as at the college's Riverhead Culinary Center and downtown Sayville Center. These facilities will be offered through self-service Kiosks at the downtown centers, for the convenience of area residents, while others will be available in career services computer labs on each campus.

In coordination with the your Suffolk Works Program, work study and Suffolk Works participants will work with Career Services offices and provide peer assistance on all campuses.

In addition, our pilot project that supports Suffolk Works participants with children placed at the College's child-care facilities will be enhanced, as they will receive priority when requesting I-PROMOTE services. The computer lab you propose to make available at the Eastern campus will accommodate much-needed job readiness outreach and training for east end residents through the College's Corporate Training Center. Such training will include Microsoft Office training. At the Ammerman Campus in Selden, enhanced services will be available to students and community members through the Career Services Center as well as through SCCC's Office for Continuing Education.

This initiative is an excellent supplement and companion program to the Commission's SCCC pilot program launched in 2015 that is creating a coordinated services-delivery hub at SCCC at which Suffolk Works clients can receive work assignments, education and child care. We wish you good luck on your application and look forward to our participation in the project.

Yours truly for the Commission,

**Richard Koubek**  
Richard Koubek, PhD, Chair

*Kathy Liguori*  
Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair

**Commission Letter to OTADA Supporting a GED Waiver**

January 15, 2016

Ms. Barbara Guinn  
Director of Employment and Advancement Services  
January 15, 2016

NYS Office of Temporary & Disability Assistance  
40 North Pearl Street  
Albany, NY 12243

Dear Ms. Guinn:

We write in support of the TANF work rules waiver sought by the Suffolk County Department of Social Services (DSS). This waiver, if granted by the Federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), would allow the County to treat participation in a Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC) program as a “core” activity. With this change the County can enable Temporary Assistance recipients to more readily engage in the educational activities they urgently need.

This letter is submitted on behalf of the Suffolk County Welfare to Work Commission. The Commission was created in 2003 for the purpose of evaluating and making recommendations with regard to “...Federal, State, and County policies and procedures designed to move people from welfare to work...”<sup>1</sup> In light of this mandate from the County Legislature, we welcome the opportunity to express our support for the waiver request.

As you know, the HHS Guidance, TANF-ACF-IM-2012-03, encourages states to seek work rules waivers that will create “...more efficient or effective means to promote employment entry, retention, advancement, or access to jobs that offer opportunities for earnings and advancement that will allow participants to avoid dependence on government benefits.” The DSS letter to OTDA is replete with persuasive data concerning the importance of a high school diploma or the equivalent in terms of employment, retention and earnings that will enable an individual to leave the welfare rolls. We will add only a few additional thoughts

The Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics has reported that in 2013 (the latest year for which data is available), the largest percentage of jobs in the nation, 39%, required a high school diploma or equivalent (HSE). The median weekly pay for such jobs was \$651, as compared with jobs that require less than a high school diploma, for which the median weekly pay was \$472, a 38% difference. Helping low-income New Yorkers earn a high school diploma or TASC dramatically improves their earnings capacity, and increases their chance of leaving

public assistance for employment. And as DSS Commissioner O’Neill notes in his letter, those who earn a high school diploma or equivalent are also considerably more likely to continue their skill-building and advance their earnings through vocational training or post-secondary education. Unemployment in the United States for those with less than a high school diploma is 11%; for individuals with a high school diploma it is 7.5%, a 31% difference.<sup>1</sup> Finally, in New

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<sup>1</sup> The source of the data in this paragraph is the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, <http://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2014/data-on-display/education-still-pays.htm>.

York State, the poverty rate for those without a high school diploma or HSE is approximately 29%; for New Yorkers with a high school diploma or HSE, the rate is less than 16%. The Welfare to Work Commission urges OTDA to embrace a policy change that would enable some of the State's poorest residents to further their education and, in so doing, greatly improve their prospects for the future.

You are well aware of the extent to which current Federal law poses daunting obstacles to participation by TANF recipients in educational activities. The simple act of redefining participation in a TASC program as a "core" activity would substantially diminish this barrier to a key educational pursuit. At Welfare to Work Commission meetings, DSS and County Department of Labor officials have repeatedly voiced their frustration with the restrictive, inflexible nature of the work rules, specifically as they pertain to the definition of GED as a "non-core" activity. But under the prevailing climate in Congress, there seemed little chance that the situation might change.

Then in 2012, HHS issued its remarkable invitation to the states to propose work rules changes, provided that such proposals would actually improve employment and related outcomes. Unfortunately, the reaction, from a small but vociferous group of commentators at the peak of the 2012 presidential and Congressional election campaigns, was such that the initiative seemed doomed from the start. However, more recently, state and local officials from around the country and across the political spectrum have decried the rigidity of the work rules and their inability to authorize work activities that would be best adapted to local conditions and most appropriate for their public assistance population. Finally, towards the end of 2015, the Republican administration of the state of Ohio submitted the first waiver request to HHS. It was significantly broader than the modest request proposed by Suffolk County DSS, but addressed the same core problem with the Federal law, the unreasonable lack of state flexibility. At this point, HHS, as has been reported, is reviewing that request.

At this point, we cannot be certain of future developments, so we may have only a limited window of opportunity. On behalf of the Suffolk County Welfare to Work Commission, we urge you to request that HHS grant the proposed waiver. The benefits will flow first to some of our neediest residents, but a better educated and more gainfully employed population will inevitably insure to the benefit of all.

We thank you for your attention to this matter and to our position.

Yours truly for the Commission,

Richard Koubek, PhD, Chair

Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair

Don Friedman

CC. John O'Neill, Commissioner, Suffolk County Department of Social Services

