

**Welfare to Work Commission
Of the Suffolk County Legislature
Minutes of the May 13, 2016 Meeting**

Present: Richard Koubek, Chair; Lisa Pinkard for Leg. Monica Martinez; Mike Stoltz; Michael Haynes; Richard Krebs; Barbara Egloff; Luis Valenzuela; Michelle O'Connell; Don Friedman; Ayesha Alleyne; Kimberly Gierasch; Valerie Smith; Charles Fox; Nina Leonhardt; Peggy Boyd

Excused: Kathy Liguori; Steve Chassman; Sr. Lisa Bergeron; Ellen Krakow

Guests: Lynn Russo, Eastern Suffolk BOCES

1. **Adoption of March Minutes:** Chair Richard Koubek reminded the Commission that the April meeting was cancelled due to the heavy meeting schedule of the Commission's Child Care and Supportive Housing Committees. The minutes of the March 11 meeting were unanimously adopted, on a motion by Mike Stoltz, seconded by Michelle O'Connell.
2. **Project Search:** Mr. Koubek introduced Lynn Russo from Eastern Suffolk BOCES who made a presentation on Project Search for high school students, ages 18-21, who have special needs. This project is a partnership with local businesses to provide training and job placement. The project now has the opportunity to expand up to the age of 24. The national employment rate for students with disabilities is 16-17% while the employment rate for students in the Search Program is 86% (possibly 100% for the 2015-2106 school year). The Search program provides on-site mentoring and training for students with special needs. Many of these students remain at their sites for permanent employment.
3. **SCCC Pilot:** Richard Krebs reported that currently there are 31 SWEP clients assigned to SCCC; four are currently working in Nina Leonhardt's office. Eight children are signed up for the Early Childhood child-care program in the fall. Mr. Koubek noted that the SCCC pilot continues to engage twice as many SWEP clients as it did in the first semester, Spring of 2015.
4. **Suffolk Bus Reductions:** Mr. Koubek reported that the Presiding Officer's staff worked with the Budget Review Office and the Department of Public Works (DPW) to explore how DPW will respond to the loss of \$11 million in revenues for the Suffolk bus system. To date, they received no indication that bus routes will be eliminated. They will continue to inquire of DPW as to what plans, if any, have been developed in the event that lines are required to be eliminated this year.
5. **IDA Scoring Tool:** Mr. Koubek reported that Jennifer Casey, the new Chair of the Suffolk County Planning Commission, will meet with him and Vice Chair Kathy Liguori later in May regarding the Commission's proposed ID Scoring Tool, which he again shared with the Commission.
6. **Supportive Housing Committee:** Chair Mike Stoltz stated that the Committee met on April 19th and plans a series of meetings to continue its mission of exploring the housing needs and opportunities for difficult-to-place people with behavioral health challenges. The next meeting, on May 26th, will include several shelter providers.
7. **State Budget Outcomes.** Don Friedman from the Empire Justice Center reported on the outcomes in the 2016 State budget of programs that serve the poor. He noted that State

budget was a mixed bag this year, with some good outcomes as well as a number that were problematic.

- a. **Auto resource rule** – Prior rule: PA households were allowed car up to value of \$4,650, unless needed to seek or retain work, in which case the allowance was up to \$9,300. Advocates preference was to allow one car to be exempt from resource rule, regardless of value. New rule: No different tiers, just one uniform rule, a car is exempt up to value of \$10,000 in 2016, \$11,000 in 2017, and \$12,000 in 2018. District has discretion to go higher.
- b. **Treating physician rule** – Prior rule: When evaluating welfare recipient’s employability, DSS must consider all medical evidence, but has total discretion about how to weigh the evidence. New rule: If the agency medical opinion differs from the client’s treating health practitioner’s opinion, the agency doctor must provide a written finding specifying why s/he disagrees with treating M.D., and present supporting evidence.
- c. **Anti-poverty task forces** – This initiative is technically part of the Governor’s Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative which began in Rochester and is now expanding statewide. Basic concept: the law identifies 16 cities, including one NYC Borough, the Bronx, and only one Long Island location, Village of Hempstead. The mayor of each city (and the Bronx Borough President) will name a non-profit to coordinate the anti-poverty task force (APTF), and will invite other non-profits to be members of the APTF, according to a set of criteria, trying to reach cross-section of the community. The APTF will identify high need issues and neighborhoods and develop a program/plan to address the issue and provide funding. Suggested issues include child poverty and homelessness. Second phase is implementation of the plan. Mr. Friedman stated that, in his view, the idea of a community studying and trying address poverty problems seems hopeful, but some serious concerns:
 - i. It is only funded at \$25 million for all 16 sites
 - ii. Funds must be used in ways that “do not necessitate ongoing state financial support.”
 - iii. The APTFs are also encouraged to secure matching funds from foundations and the private sector.

Each of these factors seem contrary to what should be a major objective: identifying successful programs, and supporting efforts to expand and fund them.

- d. **Child care funding** – There is a continuing crisis in child-care funding. Recent months 13 counties plus NYC have reduced eligibility levels. The law allows eligibility for the Child Care Block Grant (CCBG) subsidies for working-poor families up to 200% of poverty, but these counties have reduce below that level, including Suffolk, which went to from 165% to 150% of the Federal Poverty Level for open cases and 125% for new cases. Mr. Friedman stated that this is a huge challenge: 2014 federal law changes in CCDBG Act required states to adopt many new and important health, safety and quality changes. But the estimated cost to administer these new quality standards for NYS is \$190 million, with no federal money allocated for the costs. And the state budget added a very small

amount, but then added inspection costs, resulting in a net decline in actual child care subsidies. NYS is banking on a huge risk: The State has requested a federal extension for implementation of the mandated quality changes. If the extension is not granted, a significant loss of child-care slots is anticipated. Mr. Koubek noted that the Commission's 2014 child-care report forecast this situation.

- e. **NYS Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)** – advocates sought a modest 5% increase in the NYS EITC. The Senate insisted that it would only increase EITC if there was corresponding decrease in the proposed \$15/hour minimum wage increase. Assembly would not agree, resulting in no EITC increase.
 - f. **Sanctions bill** – last session the State Legislature passed what advocates thought was a very good bill to reduce the risk of inappropriate sanctions and to enable people to end their sanctions by coming into compliance with work rules. But the law only applies to NYC. There was an effort to have the law extended statewide, but it was not successful.
 - g. **Asset rules** – in addition to how cars are treated under the PA resource rules, there was also an attempt to exempt people's college savings (529 accounts) and retirement accounts. This was not successful.
 - h. **Home liens** – NYS is one of only two states where welfare applicants can be required (at county discretion) to give the county a lien on their home, if they own one. This enables the county to take back the amount of welfare payments it provided when the house is sold. A proposed law would have ended this practice, but it did not pass.
 - i. **Disability screening tool** – advocates have been trying to persuade the State Legislature to require county DSSs to offer all adult applicants the opportunity to be screened for disabilities so that they can then be offered appropriate accommodations. A bill requiring screening did not succeed. It actually was withdrawn even before going to the floor of the Assembly because of internal debates.
8. **Child Care Commission:** Lisa Pinkard reported on the first meeting of the new Child Care Commission which was held on May 9th. Legislator Martinez will chair the Commission; Ms. Pinkard will chair in the absence of the Legislator. Ms. Pinkard stated that the first meeting was very productive. While the Commission is concerned about the State's CCBG funding, it decided to focus on research and education around the two "Whereas" clauses in the resolution calling attention to the importance of early-childhood education and the shortage of child-care slots. The Commission will research the availability of safe and affordable child care slots, possibly by school districts.
9. **New Commission Members:** Mr. Koubek stated that there is a need for the Suffolk Legislature to update the membership seats on the Welfare to Work Commission: FECS has closed and that seat should be eliminated; the Suffolk Works Employment Program, Suffolk County Department of Labor, Licensing and Consumer Affairs should be merged as one seat; the Health and Welfare Council of LI has asked to be removed because they do not have sufficient staff to attend meetings. Mr. Koubek asked for suggestions on new seats. Two organizations were proposed: Long Island Coalition for the Homeless and United Way. Mr. Koubek said he would reach out to them to ascertain their interest.

10. **Announcements:**

- a. Mr. Koubek announced the LI Jobs with Justice annual “Working but Still Poor” conference on May 23rd which will have income inequality as its as its theme.
- b. Mr. Krebs announced that DOL Summer Youth Programs are posted on the DOL website.

11. **Next Meeting:** The next meeting will be June 11th.