

**Welfare to Work Commission
Of the Suffolk County Legislature
Minutes of the September 11, 2015 Meeting**

Present: Richard Koubek, Chair; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair; Lisa Pinkard for Leg. Monica Martinez, Tom Grecco for Olga Ayeles; Ellen Krakow; Eric Lopez for Richard Krebs; Jacki Powers for Mike Stoltz; Kathy Malloy; Charles Fox; Mike Haynes; Ayesha Alleyne; Luis Valenzuela; Peggy Boyd

Excused: Ray O'Rourke; Barbara Egloff; Kimberly Gierasch; Nina Leonhardt; Sr. Lisa Bergeron; Don Friedman

Absent: Steve Chassman

Guests: Christina Maher, Nancy Wolfe, Suffolk AME

1. **Minutes:** The minutes of the August meeting were approved unanimously on a motion by Kathy Liguori, seconded by Charles Fox.
2. **SCCC Ad Hoc Committee:** Absent Committee Chair Nina Leonhardt and SCDOL SWEP Director Richard Krebs, Eric Lopez gave a brief report on the status of the pilot. Final numbers (SWEP SCCC enrollments, child care placements and work assignments) for the fall semester have not yet been tabulated. Mr. Lopez stated that parents who have their own child care near their homes tend not to want to use the SCCC child-care center. Legally, parents are allowed to select their own child-care provider. DSS, with the assistance of the Child Care Council of Suffolk, can advise parents on child-care options. There ensued a discussion regarding the inflexibility of the federal government's work rules – an issue that the Commission has raised many times over the years, including one or more legislative visits with Suffolk members of Congress. Advocates had hoped that the Obama Administration would ease the work rules, but substantive changes were never introduced by the Department of Health and Human Services. Tom Grecco and Ellen Krakow expressed their frustration with the restrictive time limits placed on GED and other educational opportunities. Chair Richard Koubek again stated that he thinks the Commission should present to the Suffolk Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee an overview of the federal work rules to help them understand the rigidity of the welfare regulations that govern DSS and DOL. Mr. Koubek stated that, at a future Commission meeting, Don Friedman will provide an update of proposed changes in the federal work rules. He also announced that Nina Leonhardt will be convening a meeting of her SCCC Ad Hoc Committee in the near future to assess the status of the pilot.
3. **SCCC Adult Education Grant:** Tabled due to the absence of Nina Leonhardt.
4. **Child Support Committee:** Mr. Koubek stated that the letter to Senator Flanagan was sent immediately after the Commission's August meeting and that he contacted the Senator's office after Labor Day to set up an appointment to meet with him. He is awaiting a call-back.
5. **Legislation to Create a Child Care Committee:** Lisa Pinkard reported that Legislator Martinez had been working with Kathy Liguori and Mr. Koubek on several amendments to the resolution which she expects to lay on the table in late September or early October. Ms.

Liguori pointed out that new federal regulations requiring improved quality in the delivery of child-care services will reduce child-care slots because of administrative costs associated with the implementation and oversight of these new regulations. Mr. Koubek pointed out that the Commission's child-care report referenced this problem. Tom Grecco clarified that payment for increased number of absences in the new regulations would be diverted from funding currently used for child care slots. Ms. Liguori stated that she believes New York State will lose about 22,000 slots due to the new regulations. She noted that this is the very kind of issue that the child-care commission would monitor and oversee.

6. **ADA:** Ellen Krakow reported that she and Mr. Friedman are awaiting a response from the County attorneys to their assessment of the draft county ADA policy. The response has been slowed due to personnel changes in the County Attorney's office.
7. **Low Income Housing:** Mr. Koubek reported that the Commission has addressed all of its 2015 goals except for the goal related to housing opportunities for low-income residents earning under \$50,000 a year. He stated that, as a leader in the Huntington Township Housing Coalition, he has seen close up how difficult it is to overcome NIMBY opposition to low-income housing. He cited as one example a resolution currently under consideration by the Huntington Town Board which, among other restrictions, would require an applicant to show "severe hardship" before a home can be converted from one family to two-family status. He also cited an excellent six-hour HBO docudrama on the 1980s conflict in Yonkers over a court order requiring Yonkers to disperse its public housing from African American to white neighborhoods. This dispute was influenced by a Supreme Court decision at that time ordering Huntington to stop concentrating public housing in Huntington Station. There ensued an extended discussion on how the Commission should approach this complex issue which was briefly touched upon in its 2007 affordable housing report. Ayesha Alleyne explained that Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corporation provides weekly case management to very-low income families in its 27 homes. While this is an expensive approach to very-low income housing, it is necessary to provide residents with supportive case-management services to help them move toward self-sufficiency. Consensus was reached for the Commission to focus on two narrow areas of low-income housing:
 - a. The New York State shelter allowance for Public Assistance clients, which has not changed since the 1980s and is far below market rental rates. For example, the allowance pays a little more than \$300 for a one-bedroom apartment which would typically rent for about \$900 in Suffolk County. Tom Grecco provided Mr. Koubek with the State's shelter allowance rates. Mr. Koubek stated that the Commission could take this issue up with the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance.
 - b. The need for supportive housing for people with mental illnesses. Tom Grecco and Peggy Boyd stated that mental illness is a major impediment to Public Assistance clients and other low-income people achieving self-sufficiency. While they require supportive housing, there is not nearly enough housing stock with supportive services for people who suffer from mental illness. Problems accessing programs such as SPA (Single Point of Access) were discussed and it was agreed that the Commission will pursue this issue at a future meeting.
8. **Announcements:**
 - a. Ayesha Alleyne announced that Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corporation is celebrating its 30th anniversary on November 10th with a luncheon

honoring County Executive Steve Bellone, Babylon Supervisor Rick Schaeffer and Wyandanch Rising developer Russell Albanese.

- b. Peggy Boyd announced that Family Service League has received a grant to help people at risk of homelessness.
 - c. Ellen Krakow announced that Nassau/Suffolk Law Services has a new unit providing veterans' services.
 - d. Mike Haynes announced that federal funding for child nutrition programs is set to expire at the end of September. He will provide Mr. Koubek with details.
9. **Next Meeting:** The next meeting will be on Friday, October 9th, 9:30AM.
10. **Addendum:** Following the October 16, 2015 release of the Legislative Budget Review Office analysis of the proposed 2015 County budget which called attention to a proposed a \$10 County million cut to Suffolk bus service as well as a \$75 million cap on County Safety Net expenditures, a motion was made by Richard Koubek, seconded by Kathy Liguori, to send the letter appended below to each legislator opposing both proposals. The motion passed with an electronic vote on October 20, 2015: 13 Yes; 0 No; 1 Abstention (Don Friedman)

October 20, 2015

To: Members of the Suffolk County Legislature

The Welfare to Work Commission is appealing to you on behalf of two programs – Suffolk bus service and DSS Safety Net (SN) services - slated for reductions in County spending in the recommended 2016 budget at a time that we fully understand you are grappling with a serious and unforeseen budget deficit due to a decline in sales tax revenues.

The Commission is fully aware that State's repeated failures to provide adequate funding to Suffolk for public buses and Safety Net are responsible for these recommended 2016 budget reductions. At numerous times in the past, the Commission has joined with you and the County Executive urging the State to adequately fund bus service as well as other County programs. We are prepared to do so again, calling upon the State to increase Suffolk's transportation funding by \$10 million and reduce the County's 71% share of Safety Net costs.

To close the sales tax revenue gap, the BRO report provides a number of difficult but doable options, including borrowing from the Assessment Stabilization Reserve Fund, which the Commission asks that you to consider. In so doing, it is our hope that you will find the resources to consider the following recommendations.

Restore the \$11.3 million reductions to Suffolk County Transit (SCT) and SCAT contained in the recommended budget. As the BRO report states, this cut will lead to "a reduction of approximately 11% or 846,228 revenue miles" in SCT lines and a yet to be determined reductions to SCAT within a recommended budget that "provides for no growth in [SCAT] demand." With your and the County Executive's support, Suffolk has gained some Sunday service and some extended evening service over the past several years. These gains will be lost if the County cuts are initiated and the State does not provide the additional \$10 million in transportation aid which, a number of transportation and budget experts believe, the State will not do in 2016. Public buses are essential to poor people who need them to get to and from work, to local business that rely on them for workers and customers, to disabled Suffolk residents, and so many more. A sound bus system is at the heart of the County's current economic

development plans. These budget cuts work directly against the current and future health of the Suffolk economy.

Do not place a \$75 million cap on Safety Net (SN) services. Safety Net serves some of Suffolk’s most vulnerable citizens including single adults, families of people suffering from substance and alcohol abuse illnesses and welfare recipients with multiple self-sufficiency barriers who have exceeded the 60 month federal TANF limit. Many SN clients are actual or potential members of the homeless population whose needs are costly in both human and material ways. The BRO report outlines on page 269 nine programs DSS is considering to reduce SN costs to the County. The Commission believes that these programs should be given an opportunity to be implemented and evaluated. Additionally, we have been received a legal opinion that a County SN cap is “a dangerous idea that could in effect force the County to violate state law and the state constitution. Safety Net assistance is mandated by statute and by the state constitution for all eligible applicants.” For these reasons, the Commission respectfully requests that the Legislature table the SN cap at this time. Meanwhile, as indicated above, the Commission will support County efforts as part of a State-wide advocacy campaign, calling on the State to reduce the 71% County contribution to SN that was imposed in 2011.

We wish you well in the coming weeks as you prepare the final budget under these most difficult circumstances. However, we also ask that you give serious attention in your deliberations to Suffolk’s critical public bus system and vulnerable Safety Net population.

Yours truly for the Commission,

Richard Koubek
Richard Koubek, Chair

Kathy Liguori
Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair

CC: Gilbert Anderson, Commissioner of Public Works
John O’Neill, Commissioner of Social Services