

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

**Present:** Richard Koubek, Chair; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair; Tom Grecco for Olga Ayeles; Lisa Pinkard for Leg. Monica Martinez, Ellen Krakow; Don Friedman; Richard Krebs; Christina Maher; Charles Fox; Barbara Egloff; Ayesha Alleyne; Nina Leonhardt; Valerie Smith

**Excused:** Kimberly Gierasch; Ray O'Rourke; Mike Stoltz; Mike Haynes; Sr. Lisa Bergeron; Luis Valenzuela; Peggy Boyd

**Absent:** Steve Chassman

1. **Minutes:** The minutes of the November meeting were approved unanimously, following a correction introduced by Richard Krebs, on a motion by Mr. Krebs, seconded by Barbara Egloff.
2. **Debrief of Commissioner O'Neill's November Presentation:** Chair Richard Koubek again commended DSS Commissioner John O'Neill for his excellent presentation at the November meeting. There was consensus that the Commissioner covered a great deal of ground with some interesting innovations in DSS policies and procedures. Mr. Koubek stated that he was happy to see the Commissioner raise up housing for the mentally ill as one of his 2016 priorities since this may be a Commission priority as well, which is discussed below.
3. **SCCC Ad Hoc Committee:** Chair Nina Leonhardt expressed gratitude that progress has been made with the pilot, as reported at the November meeting. Mr. Koubek noted that Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory, who helped launch this pilot, has been informed of the progress and personally thanked the Committee members. Ms. Leonhardt noted that Tom Grecco has drafted a flier that will be used by DOL SWEP counselors to highlight the SCCC opportunities for work experience, child care and education. The Commission reviewed the draft flier and made several edits. Mr. Koubek thanked Mr. Grecco for his efforts.
4. **Child Care Commission:** Child Care Committee Chair Kathy Liguori reported that she, Mr. Koubek, Commissioner John O'Neill, Lisa Pinkard and Legislator Monica Martinez met on December 7<sup>th</sup> to discuss the draft legislation to create a Child Care Commission. The resolution has been tabled. She reported that this meeting produced agreement with the Commissioner, the legislator, herself and Mr. Koubek that the resolution should be refiled in January, 2016. She stated that most of the amendments recommended in October by the Child Care Committee were accepted. She also stated that the resolution will call for a one-year life span for the commission, subject to renewal at the end of the first year. Ms. Liguori noted the concern by the County Executive and members of the Legislature that the new commission should not be asking the County for additional child-care funds during the current budget crisis. She said that the Child Care Commission might gather data and raise public awareness about the importance of child care during its first year. She also pointed out the Commissioner's concerns that the new federal child-care quality standards have not been funded and therefore may cost the County child-care seats, possibly with the CCBG income threshold having to be lowered from its current 165% of the Federal poverty level.
5. **Child Support:** Mr. Koubek and Mr. Krebs reported that they surveyed SWEP counselors to determine if he counselors thought that a significant number of clients were walking away

from work or parenting due to the 9% State interest on child-support arrears. As discussed in earlier Commission meetings, Mr. Krebs again stated that there is no empirical data that would prove these patterns of behavior, as has been requested by Senator John Flanagan's staff. However, the SWEPP counselors could tap into their experience to estimate the degree of the problem. While their estimates varied widely, they did average out to 41% of counselors who believed their clients avoided work and 22% who believed their clients walked away from parenting due to the 9% interest rate. Mr. Koubek stated that he would ask Jane Smith from DSS to provide data on the number of clients who are in arrears. This research will continue.

6. **Bus Funding:** Mr. Koubek reported that Senator Flanagan apparently said at two public meetings he would not consider additional State funding for Suffolk bus service until the County restored some of the \$10 million in County funds that were cut in the 2016 budget.
7. **Presentation on TANF Reforms:** Don Friedman provided an overview of proposed federal TANF reforms which he noted, have not moved in Washington.
  - a. Mr. Friedman stated that since the so-called "welfare reform" enacted in 1996, the percentage of poor families receiving assistance has fallen dramatically from 68/100 families to 23/100 families. He noted that House Speaker Paul Ryan and others are proposing that major supports such as food stamps (SNAP) be collapsed into a single block grant. Should this occur, it will be much more difficult to both fund and defend these programs and will allow states more latitude to shift program funding to other programs.
  - b. Among the TANF reforms that were proposed by advocates such as the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities is allowing more opportunities for education and training by, for example, eliminating the classification of work-related activities as "core" or "non-core."
  - c. Mr. Friedman pointed out that in 2012 the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) invited states to request waivers from the existing work rules if such waivers would improve work-related outcomes. Unfortunately this occurred at the height of the 2012 presidential election and became a heated campaign issue with Republicans accusing the Obama administration of diluting the work component of TANF. As a result, few no states, including New York, requested waivers until last month.
  - d. Tom Grecco stated that Suffolk urged New York State's Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) to request a waiver from HHS to allow GED to count as a Core Activity. OTDA refused to make the request to HHS. Mr. Friedman pointed out that Ohio Governor John Kasich, a Republican, has requested waivers that would add more educational opportunities by eliminating the core-non-core distinction. Mr. Krebs stated that allowing three years of education as a core activity would be a major breakthrough toward helping SWEPP clients achieve self-sufficiency.
  - e. Mr. Koubek suggested that the Commission should adopt the Ohio waiver plan as a 2016 priority. He asked Mr. Friedman to draw up a proposal which could be submitted to Governor Andrew Cuomo and OTDA. The Commission reached consensus to pursue this priority.
8. **2016 Commission Priorities:** Mr. Koubek initiated a conversation on the Commission's 2016 priorities.

- a. The Commission reviewed the 2015 priorities, noting that of the 9 major priorities and 11 sub-priorities, all but two of the sub-priorities were addressed. The two not addressed were a presentation to the Legislature on new health-care rules and the IDA scoring tool which was delayed due to personnel changes at IDA.
- b. The Commission reached consensus to carry over the following 2015 priorities into 2016:
  - i. Continue to disseminate the Commission’s report, “Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County,” while pursuing these prioritized recommendations in the report:
    - 1. 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 (SCDOL) and Suffolk County Department of Health (SCDOH).
    - 2. Monitor 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.
    - 3. Monitor Suffolk bus service as it relates to the needs of poor and near-poor people.
    - 4. Create a scoring tool to measure supports provided to working-poor people by companies seeking a Suffolk County IDA benefit.
  - ii. 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 these prioritized recommendations:
    - 1. Establishing a legislatively-created Child Care and Early Learning Commission
    - 2. 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 flawed CCBG formula used by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS.)
  - iii. 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 Community College and Eastern Suffolk BOCES toward the goal of creating SCDSS/SCDOL “hub centers” for the delivery of multiple SWEP services, including work experience, education, training and child care.
  - iv. Continue working toward adoption and implementation of a Suffolk County and SCDSS Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) policy. In addition:
    - 1. Monitor the effectiveness of the ADA “Did You Know?” brochure intended to educate individuals applying for public assistance about their rights and opportunities under the ADA.
    - 2. Monitor the status and effectiveness of the nonprofit liaison communication lines crafted in 2012 by the Commission’s

Employment Assessment Committee in cooperation with SCDSS and SCDOL.

- v. Continue to explore Federal and State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) policies toward the goal of eliminating or minimizing disincentives for non-custodial parents to work.
  - c. Mr. Koubek reminded the Commission that Commissioner O'Neill identified housing for the mentally ill as one of his DSS priorities for 2016. He noted that the Commission has also been discussing this issue and that Ralph Fasano from Concern for Independent Living will be speaking to the Commission at the January 8<sup>th</sup> meeting. He pointed out that he, Kathy Liguori, Mike Stoltz and Peggy Boyd have discussed the possibility of holding public hearings and issuing a Commission report on this issue in 2016. The discussion of this priority will take place at the January meeting.
  - d. As noted above, there was consensus to pursue a priority for seeking a New York State waiver from TANF rules to allow for more educational opportunities for SWEP clients.
  - e. There was also consensus to explore whether DSS clients have experienced an increase in drug dependence that reflects the increased drug dependency in the general Suffolk population.
9. **Announcements:** Nina Leonhardt announced that SCCC has funds for people who have been unemployed 20 weeks or more to receive career training at SCCC.
10. **Next Meeting:** The next meeting will be on Friday, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 9:30AM.