

**Welfare to Work Commission
Of the Suffolk County Legislature
Minutes of the June 19, 2015 Meeting**

Present: Richard Koubek, Chair; Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory; Lisa Pinkard for Leg. Monica Martinez, Tom Grecco for Olga Ayeles; Ellen Krakow; James Andrews; Charles Fox; Mike Stoltz; Mike Haynes; Audrey Gottlieb for Barbara Egloff; Marjorie Acevedo; Kathy Malloy for Joan Travan; Sr. Lisa Bergeron; Aysha Alleyne; Peggy Boyd; Nina Leonhardt; Don Friedman; Richard Krebs for Ray O'Rourke

Excused: Kathy Liguori; Kimberly Gierasch; Luis Valenzuela

Absent: Steve Chassman

Guests: Jane Smith, DSS Child Support

1. **Memorial to Debbie Coleman:** Chair Richard Koubek asked for a moment of silence in memory of legislative aide Debbie Coleman who passed away after a long struggle with cancer. Ms. Coleman was an aide to the Clerk of the Legislature and had been of enormous assistance to the Commission. Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory and Marge Acevedo also spoke of Ms. Coleman's devoted service to the Legislature. Mr. Koubek observed that Ms. Coleman spent her last days at Good Shepherd Hospice where Kathy Liguori's sister is currently being cared for in her struggle with cancer. He said that Ms. Liguori requested to be excused from today's meeting in order to be at her sister's side and he asked all to keep Ms. Liguori in their thoughts.
2. **Tribute to Marge Acevedo:** Mr. Koubek announced that Marge Acevedo is retiring and will no longer serve as the Presiding Officer's representative on the Commission. He said that Ms. Acevedo has been the most engaged and effective person to hold this position since the Commission was created in 2003. He urged the Presiding Officer to choose a replacement as qualified as Ms. Acevedo. Ms. Acevedo expressed her gratitude for having had the opportunity to serve on the Commission which she considers one of her most rewarding assignments.
3. **Introduction of the Presiding Officer and Report on the Wage Board Hearing:** Mr. Koubek introduced Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory and noted that he and the Presiding Officer as well as Legislators Monica Martinez and Kate Browning provided testimony on June 18th at the Long Island, New York State Fast Food Workers' Wage Board hearing, calling for \$15 minimum wage for these workers. He reported that almost all the speakers supported the \$15 wage. Thanking the Commission for their June 10th electronic consensus permitting him to testify on behalf of the Commission, Mr. Koubek said that his testimony included distributing the Commission's 2012 poverty report, which was well received by the wage board members. The wage board will render its recommendation to Governor Andrew Cuomo in the coming weeks.
4. **SCCC Ad Hoc Committee:** Mr. Koubek thanked Presiding Officer Gregory for taking time to attend today's Commission meeting in order to hear an update on the Suffolk County Community College (SCCC) pilot project. He noted that this project began when the Presiding Officer attended the April 2014 Commission meeting and asked the Commission to

work with him on improving educational opportunities for Public Assistance clients. A meeting with him and members of the Commission followed in August and that, in turn, led to the formation of an Ad Hoc Committee to develop a pilot project to create a hub at SCCC for the placement of SWEP clients who would have opportunities for child care while they attended college courses and received their work placement on campus. Mr. Koubek then introduced Ad Hoc Committee Chair Nina Leonhardt.

- a. Ms. Leonhardt reported that SCCC has reserved until August 7th 16 of 48 child care slots on both the Brentwood and Selden campuses. She and James Andrews commended SCCC for their cooperation on this pilot.
 - b. Ms. Leonhardt and Mr. Andrews reported that the “unofficial” launch of the pilot for the spring semester did not have sufficient lead-in time to recruit placements. One SWEP client accepted a placement at SCCC but then decided on another educational setting. Over the summer, DOL will be devoting time and resources toward recruiting clients for the fall semester which begins on August 26th. Two Commission agencies, Family Service League and Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corporation which have case managers will be working with DOL to identify potential placements.
 - c. Ms. Leonhardt and Richard Krebs, Director of the DOL/SWEP program, reported that clients who wish to participate in the SCCC pilot project need to meet certain basic requirements such as reading level, past educational experiences, child-care needs and work preferences. Mr. Krebs will serve as the liaison for this pilot and will make final determinations regarding placements. SCCC will coordinate Vocational Educational and Work Experience placements. Ms. Leonhardt will coordinate noncredit SCCC placements such as specific job-training courses. Ms. Leonhardt noted that the pilot is open to clients who matriculate as well as those who take non-credit courses. It is also open to clients who do not need child care.
 - d. Ms. Leonhardt stated that Eastern Suffolk BOCES has worked on developing the pilot but that they cannot receive clients as yet because they are not an approved work site. That status may change in the coming academic year.
 - e. Presiding Officer Gregory thanked the Ad Hoc Committee and the full Commission for their cooperation on this important pilot.
5. **Sober Homes DSS Pilot:** Mr. Koubek reported that in May he had been invited by a Huntington civic group, Huntington Matters, to speak about the Commission’s 2010 sober homes report. In preparation, he reached out to Tom Grecco for an update on the status of a pilot DSS is developing under the aegis of the Sober Homes Oversight Board. Mr. Koubek noted that this pilot is very impressive and that it was well received by the Huntington Matters group. He then invited Mr. Grecco to give an overview of the pilot.
- a. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Fair Housing Act (FHA) prohibit governments from discriminating against people with alcohol and substance abuse illnesses by imposing special restrictions on their housing that do not apply to all homes in a specific jurisdiction. However, rent-payment enhancements can be provided in exchange for enhanced services as detailed in the Transitional Recovery Homes Request for Qualifications (RFQ). DSS therefore sent out an RFQ offering sober homes providers an enhanced housing reimbursement not to exceed the congregate-care rate (twice the existing reimbursement rate) if they would agree to oversight such as unannounced inspections by DSS, zero-tolerance

of drugs and alcohol, a house manager, overnight supervision, property upkeep and more. These homes will be called Transitional Recovery Homes. Four providers qualify for this pilot and one has already been launched for a women's Transitional Recovery Home with 8 beds.

- b. Mr. Koubek pointed out that the *New York Times* ran an extensive front-page story on unsupervised New York City sober homes (referred to as “three-quarter houses”) just a few days after his Huntington Matters presentation. He and several other Commission members were surprised that the story did not chide New York State’s Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) for not taking regulatory responsibility for sober homes. Mr. Grecco stated that while OASAS has been cooperative in developing the Suffolk pilot, they do not regulate sober homes. Mr. Grecco noted that New York City may consider adoption of the Suffolk Transitional Recovery Home model. Mr. Koubek stated the long-held position by the Commission, DSS and members of the Suffolk Legislature that OASAS ultimately needs to assume regulatory responsibility for sober homes.
 - c. Mike Stoltz pointed out that 70 percent of people with substance abuse problems relapse within 90 days of their recovery. This fact puts additional pressure on creating sober homes that are free from any conditions which encourage relapse. Ellen Krakow asked if residents who relapse will be immediately evicted from the DSS pilot homes. Mr. Grecco responded that each case will be treated individually and that negotiations with the offending client are an important part of the process. Mr. Stoltz stated that individualized negotiations rather than a blanket eviction policy is the best way to deal with relapses. Mr. Krakow and Mr. Grecco agreed.
 - d. Mr. Koubek reminded the Commission and the Presiding Officer that the Sober Homes Oversight Board was created by the Legislature as a result of the Commission’s sober-homes report. He noted that the Commission is hoping to accomplish the same goal with child care by encouraging the Legislature to create an Early Learning and Child Care Commission. The Presiding Officer thanked DSS for their work on this pilot project.
6. **Child Support Committee:** Chair James Andrews stated that this Committee had reached consensus on three child-support goals for non-custodial parents:
- 9% NYS (Federal) rate of interest charged for child-support arrears. Interest charges end up dwarfing the non-custodial parent’s collectible balance. Lobby for relief by lowering the interest rate.
 - More accurate answers / consistent information coming out of NYS Call Center which handles over 85 % of calls for Suffolk County (Maybe a more user friendly NYS Website with better FAQ’s)
 - Ask NYS for a waiver to allow non-custodial parents to make principal balance only collections for the first 6 or 12 months after somebody finds employment through Suffolk DOL. Basically a reduced /modified payment plan where every dollar collected over a minimum reduces accumulated interest charge or something similar. A pilot program through NYS OTDA would be good.
- a. Jane Smith from the DSS Child Support department distributed a report initiated after the Commission focused on child support in the fall of 2014. The report targeted 1,034 cases for review; of these 995 required no action and 39 require

additional action. Mr. Koubek thanked MS. Smith and the Department for this follow-up.

- b. Mr. Koubek asked what steps the Commission might take to encourage the State to introduce the changes in child support enforcement suggested by the Committee. Peggy Boyd stated that Senator John Flanagan, the new Majority Leader and Chair of the Senate Education Committee, might be open to these proposed changes. Mr. Koubek asked Ms. Smith if she would consult with Commission John O'Neill about preparing brief talking points that the Commission could then use in presenting its case to Senator Flanagan and other State officials. Ms. Smith agreed to do so.
 - c. Ellen Krakow reported on two new Nassau Suffolk Law Services programs to help custodial parents with child-support issues. For both programs, the clients must meet Nassau Suffolk Law Services financial eligibility guidelines. The first program is the "Self Help" program for custodial parents living in Suffolk County who need to, but have not yet, filed a petition in Family Court to either: (1) obtain child support; (2) modify an existing child support order; (3) enforce an existing child support order because the other parent is not paying the ordered amount of support. In this program, Nassau Suffolk Law Services provides legal assistance in preparing the necessary court petition, and gives the client advice regarding their eventual hearing. Nassau Suffolk Law Services does not appear with the client at the hearing. The clients will appear on their own. The second program provides a pro-bono attorney who will appear with the client in Family Court at their child-support hearing. Like the other program, it is only available to the custodial parent, and that parent must live in Suffolk County and meet the income guidelines. Also, the parent already must have filed a child support petition and been referred to the program by the Family Court magistrate at their initial hearing. (The custodial parent can ask the magistrate for a referral to this program during their initial hearing.) Ms. Krakow also reported that Tuoro College center hosts a free monthly seminar for non-custodial parents who wish to modify their child-support obligation and stated that she would circulate a flier with upcoming dates for this program. Sr. Lisa Bergeron said that she will publicize these programs to parish outreach directors. All Commission members were urged to do the same. Mr. Koubek said that he will circulate to the entire Commission fliers about the programs.
7. **Approval of May Minutes:** The minutes of the May meeting were approved unanimously on a motion by Marge Acevedo, seconded by Kathy Malloy.
 8. **Health Care Delivery System Changes and a Possible Mental Health Pilot:** Mr. Koubek called attention to the extensive report detailed in the May minutes on the complex changes taking place in New York State's health care delivery system. He also provided each Commission member with a summary of these changes that had been distributed at the May meeting by the presenters from Hudson River Health Care (HRHC). One Commission member commended Mike Stoltz for bringing this issue before the Commission as a 2015 goal and for his assistance in helping all to understand the changes. Mr. Koubek said that a summary of the changes should be prepared for the Legislature and that the Health Committee should hear a presentation similar to what the Commission heard at its May meeting. Mr. Koubek asked, in the context of these changes and another Commission goal

for 2015, if Mr. Stoltz thought the time had come to form a committee to shape a pilot to help mental and behavioral health DSS/DOL clients attain education. Mr. Stoltz said that major decisions will be announced by the State in early 2016 regarding the managed care companies that manage Suffolk's Medicaid program and therefore the Commission needs to wait for these decisions before forming a committee.

9. **Legislation to Create a Child Care Committee:** Mr. Koubek reported that he has spoken with Legislator Monica Martinez who remains committed to this legislation. She is still working on building support and overcoming concerns among her colleagues as well as in the Administration that (1) the new commission might fall into the category of others which do not meet and/or (2) the new commission might advocate for expensive County-funded child-care programs that the County cannot afford and the State will not fund.
10. **ADA:** Mr. Koubek reported that Legislator Martinez arranged for a meeting between him, DSS Commissioner John O'Neill and herself in May to improve communications between the Commission and DSS regarding the ADA policy. There was agreement to hold a second meeting with members of the Commission's Employment Assessment Committee and ADA staff. Don Friedman reported that he and Ms. Krakow are about to send back to the County attorneys their comments on a draft County ADA. Mr. Grecco restated the Department's position that the best approach to the ADA is for a County policy template to be agreed upon. Until such time, DSS will continue to use its policy that has been authorized by OTDA. Mr. Friedman again stated that there are interim steps DSS should take now while the County policy is being drafted. Lisa Pinkard noted that, despite differences, DSS, the Commission and Legislator Martinez share the same goal of having policies and procedures that best serve disabled DSS and DOL clients.
11. **IDA Scoring Tool:** Mr. Koubek stated that he and David Calone are still working on setting up a meeting with the Suffolk IDA to discuss the scoring tool.
12. **Next Meeting:** The next meeting will be on Friday, July 12th.