

**Welfare to Work Commission
Of the Suffolk County Legislature
Minutes of the March 20, 2015 Meeting**

Present: Richard Koubek, Chair; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair; Lisa Pinkard for Leg. Monica Martinez, Commissioner John O’Neill for John Nieves; Ellen Krakow; James Andrews; Luis Valenzuela; Ayesha Alleyne; Mike Haynes; Kimberly Gierasch; Barbara Egloff; Marjorie Acevedo; Peggy Boyd; Michael Stoltz; Don Friedman

Excused: Sr. Lisa Bergeron; Charles Fox; Ray O’Rourke; Joan Travan; Nina Leonhardt; Steve Chassman

Guests: Art Fleisher, Division of Community Mental Hygiene, SC Department of Health; Tom Grecco, Client Benefits Division, SCDSS

1. **Minutes:** The minutes of the February meeting were adopted, following the inclusion of two amended statements, on a motion by Kathy Liguori, seconded by Commissioner O’Neill (Abstention: Marjorie Acevedo).
2. **Employment Assessment Committee and ADA Policy Proposal:**
 - a. Ellen Krakow reported that she, Don Friedman and Commissioner O’Neill were part of the ADA meeting with the County Attorneys and other executive staff, including representatives from several County departments, held at the Dennison Building on February 13th, following the February Welfare to Work meeting. The group discussed a draft version prepared by the County Attorneys, of what will be a County-wide ADA policy. There appeared to be a consensus between the disability advocates and the County Attorneys attending the meeting as to how the proposed draft could be improved upon. Each County department will be required to use the County-wide template to develop its own ADA policy containing language that is pertinent to the operations and practices of that department.. Deputy County Executive Luis Montes stated at the meeting that each County department will soon be asked to conduct a survey assessing the degree to which the department is currently ADA compliant. Mr. Montes also explained that further discussions between the disability advocates and Commissioner O’Neill regarding the current DSS/ADA policy and the proposed revised policy created by the Commission’s Employment Assessment Committee will be postponed until the surveys from each of the other departments are completed. Commissioner O’Neill supported Ms. Krakow’s assessment of the meeting.
 - b. Ms. Krakow reiterated a request she made to Commission O’Neill at the end of the February 13th meeting with the County Executive Staff that DSS agree to implement a few interim measures regarding how ADA reasonable accommodations are provided. The requested interim measures included: (1) establishing a contact person at DSS whom client advocates could speak with regarding ADA issues; (2) allowing front-line workers to grant routine reasonable accommodation requests, or offer routine accommodations where the client doesn’t request it, but where one appears to be needed. Ms. Krakow explained

that under DSS' current ADA policy, all decisions regarding ADA reasonable accommodations can only be made by DSS' Center Managers, who have many other responsibilities and are not always available or even on site to provide these authorizations; and (3) notifying front-line workers that they have authority to make such routine accommodations.

- c. Commissioner O'Neill again stated that center managers are empowered to make ADA decisions and to assist front-line workers. He also reiterated his position that DSS should not be held to a higher ADA standard than other County departments and that interim procedures would be premature pending development of a County-wide ADA policy template. He also stated that most people with disabilities are currently being identified and that reasonable accommodations are being assigned for these clients. Tom Grecco stated that all DSS front-line workers receive ADA training and that, under current policies and procedures, the center manager is the appropriate "go-to" person if a front-line worker has a question or concern about a particular case. Ms. Krakow stated that it would be much better to have a lower-level supervisor, who has been given proper ADA training, to assist front line workers when they have questions regarding the granting of a reasonable accommodation.
 - d. Richard Koubek pointed out that the February Commission minutes reflect what has been the Commission's position throughout the ADA discussions since they began in 2009: the majority of clients with disabilities are being identified and are receiving reasonable accommodations. The focus in a new ADA policy needs to be on those falling through the cracks, especially people with undiagnosed mental illness, as well as improving the reasonable accommodations that are provided to disabled clients. Ms. Krakow and Don Friedman stated that it has never been their position, since discussion on ADA began, that DSS is pervasively not providing ADA accommodations to those that need it. Rather, the goal of these discussions has been to examine how DSS practices in this area could be improved upon.
3. **Mental Health Assessment Tools:** Mr. Koubek noted that the Commission has been focusing on a mental-health assessment tool prior to and during the ADA discussions because there has been a consensus on the Commission and at DSS that the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) does not provide adequate guidance or resources for the assessment of mental health. He also stated that Mike Stoltz's proposal to create a pilot program to help DSS/DOL clients with behavioral-health problems access education and training, possibly as part of the SCCC/Eastern Suffolk BOCES "hub" pilot, requires a strong mental-health assessment tool. Mr. Grecco stated that DSS has developed a Suffolk enhanced assessment tool to identify mental-health conditions which is more detailed than the OTDA assessment, that has been shared with Legislator Martinez and which, at the appropriate time, will be folded into the ADA discussions.
- a. Mr. Friedman shared with the Commission the OTDA "MMS" or "Modified Mini Screen" mental-health assessment tool that was validated by the respected Nathan Kline Institute for Psychiatric Research after being piloted with about 500 clients in 5 or 6 State DSS districts. The tool contains 22 detailed questions designed to identify mental illness. He pointed out that the way the screening tool might be used is that a client's positive answer to a designated number of the 22 questions

would trigger an offer of an in-depth mental health assessment. Mr. Friedman noted that it was intended that the MMS could be administered by someone with some training but without mental-health credentials. But Mike Stoltz and Art Fleischer each stated that this kind of detailed tool would probably require a trained mental-health clinician to be properly administered.

- b. Mr. Friedman noted that the MMS tool as validated was administered on a computer, with the client wearing headphones to hear the questions read aloud by a DSS worker. Mr. Koubek asked if this tool is intended to be administered to all incoming clients and if it would require additional staff to be properly administered. Mr. Friedman said that he believes it should be offered to all clients and that he hopes OTDA will require its use rather than simply recommend that districts use the tool, and that OTDA will also provide districts with whatever resources might be needed to accomplish this.
 - c. Mr. Friedman also briefly reviewed the Commission's ADA draft assessment tool, which is much shorter than the MMS and contains, in addition to several mental-health questions, other disability assessment questions including substance abuse and learning disabilities. He also noted that the Commission's draft tool contains some useful questions about clients' abilities to perform some basic skills of daily living and about the clients' recent employment history.
 - d. Peggy Boyd reminded the Commission that she raised at the January meeting her concern that many mentally-ill people are falling through the cracks and cannot access important services, especially emergency housing. Mr. Koubek stated that the Commission had decided to refine this broad concern to the 2015 goal of understanding changes in the on-going State health-care delivery system, with a special focus on mental health. Mike Stoltz and Art Fleischer described how some of these institutional changes may result in greater flexibility in the delivery of services. For example, under the new health-care regulations, there may be more mental-health case managers available to serve people living in emergency shelters. Mr. Koubek restated the goal, adopted for 2015, for the Commission to become more familiar with these complex regulation changes and then, possibly, to educate the legislators about the coming changes. He said that he hopes to have an expert in the field, perhaps from Hudson River health care, which is assuming control of most of the County's clinics, to explain the privatization of the clinics, as they become Federally Qualified Health Care centers, in the context of the State's new and still emerging health-care delivery system.
4. **Annual Report to the Legislature:** Mr. Koubek called attention to the draft Commission's annual report to the Legislature which had been distributed in early March. With no suggestions from the floor for changes, the report was adopted unanimously on a motion by Kathy Liguori, seconded by Peggy Boyd. The report is appended below.
 5. **Child Care Report:** Kathy Liguori reported that she and Mr. Koubek met with Robin Beller, Regional Long Island Director of the NYS Office of Children and Family Services, (OCFS) on March 16th to discuss the Commission's child-care report. Specifically, Ms. Beller had concerns that the sections of the report dealing with OCFS seemed to suggest that the State had somehow wronged Suffolk County with the formula used to determine the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCBG) allocation over the past five years. Ms. Beller admitted that the child-care subsidy is not within her direct area of responsibilities. She was provided

a copy of Commissioner O'Neill's excellent summary of the CCBG issue in a 2014 letter to OCFS, which was included in the report. She asked for the OCFS response to this letter and said she would inquire about the issue with the administrators in charge of the CCBG subsidy at OCFS in Albany for a better understanding and a possible future meeting to resolve the matter. Commissioner O'Neill agreed to share the OCFS response letter with Ms. Liguori for this purpose. He also stated that he is assembling a portfolio of all the correspondence between OCFS, the Commission and DSS on the CCBG issue.

6. **Child Care Commission Resolution:** Lisa Pinkard stated that Legislator Martinez pulled the resolution after receiving comments and questions from her colleagues in order to edit the "Whereas" clauses. The resolution will hopefully be placed back on the table in May. Mr. Koubek stated that a panel of child-care experts has been assembled to support the resolution and asked that they be provided with the opportunity to make a formal presentation to the Human Services Committee when it is up for consideration. Ms. Pinkard said she would try to arrange for this presentation.
7. **Child Support:** James Andrews reported that this issue is still a work-in-progress. Mr. Koubek again urged him to convene the committee as soon as possible to finalize their recommendations.
8. **Next Meeting:** The next meeting will be on Friday, April 10th, 9:30 AM in Conference Room A of the SCDOL One Stop Center.

Suffolk County Legislature

Richard Koubek, Ph.D., Chair
Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair

MARJORIE ACEVEDO
For Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory

AYESHA ALLEYNE
Wyandanch Homes and Property
Development Corporation

JAMES ANDREWS
Suffolk County Department of Labor
Suffolk Works Employment Program

SR. LISA BERGERON
Catholic Charities

PEGGY BOYD
Family Service League

STEVE CHASSMAN
LI Council on Alcoholism and Drug
Dependence

BARBARA EGLOFF
Eastern Suffolk BOCES

CHARLES FOX
EOC - Suffolk, Inc.

DON FRIEDMAN
Empire Justice Center

KIMBERLY GIERASCH
Suffolk County Department of Health

MICHAEL HAYNES
Long Island Cares, Inc.



WELFARE TO WORK COMMISSION
of the Suffolk County Legislature
c/o Clerk of the Legislature
725 Veterans Memorial Highway
Smithtown NY 11787
631-499-6725

March 20, 2015

To: Members of the Suffolk County Legislature:

The Welfare to Work Commission is pleased to provide you with our 2014 annual report as well as our 2015 Commission goals. As you can see in the attached report, the Commission was again very active in 2014, with these activities:

1. Continuing to disseminate our 2013 report, "Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County" while pursuing these prioritized report recommendations:
 - a. Expanding educational opportunities for SWEP clients by creating a pilot for the delivery of coordinated SWEP work experience, training



March 2015

Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature

**2014 Annual Report
and 2015 Goals**

As required by the 15th Resolve of Resolution No. 181-2003, the Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature is pleased to submit its annual report containing the Commission's goals for 2015 and a summary of its activities for 2014.

Commission 2015 Goals

1. 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:
 - a. 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).
 - b. 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.
 - c. Monitor Suffolk bus service as it relates to the needs of poor and near-poor people.
 - d. Create a scoring tool to measure supports provided to working-poor people by companies seeking a Suffolk County IDA benefit.
2. 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:
 - a. Establishing a legislatively-created Child Care and Early Learning Commission
 - b. 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.)
3. 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.
4. Continue working toward adoption and implementation of a Suffolk County and SCDSS Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) policy. In addition:
 - a. 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.
 - b. 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.
5. 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.

6. Assess the availability and accessibility in Suffolk County of housing opportunities for HUD-defined low-income families earning under \$52,550 for a family of four which is 50% of the HUD Suffolk Area Median Income (\$105,100 for a family of four.)
7. Educate members of the Commission, the Suffolk Legislature and community-based service providers about the nature and impact of Governor Andrew Cuomo’s Medicaid Reform Task Force transformation of New York’s health-care delivery system. This transformation includes:
 - a. Medicaid Managed Care and health home-care management for all Medicaid-eligible recipients;
 - b. The “basics of Medicaid Managed Care” including hospital reform (Delivery System Reform Incentive Program), health home-care management for all recipients; and the push toward physical health/behavioral health integration of care;
 - c. Expansion of Medicaid waivers and funds through the Regional Centers of Excellence (e.g. Pilgrim State Psychiatric Center) to expand services to people with psychiatric disabilities.
8. Pursuant to the expansion of Medicaid waivers through Regional Centers of Excellence identified in goal (7,c) above, which include expansion of supported education and supported employment services, consider a program design(s) to provide additional supports to TANF and SN clients who have behavioral health challenges to help them successfully attain a college education and employment.
9. Continue to assess implementation of the recommendations in the Commission’s 2010 sober homes report regarding policies and procedures to improve the oversight and delivery of services at sober homes in Suffolk County.

Commission 2014 Activities

“Struggling in Suburbia” Report

The Commission continued to disseminate its report, “Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County”. In January, 2014, the report was featured in a PBS Weekend Newshour segment, “Poverty Rates Soar in the Suburbs,” that was broadcast nationally on January 11th, and then rebroadcast several times at later dates. Commission Chair Richard Koubek presented the report at the June 2014 SUNY Stony Brook conference, “How Class Works” as well as at an EOC-Long Island luncheon in June commemorating the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty. In addition, per the Commission’s 2014 goals, among the report’s recommendations prioritized in 2014 were:

1. ***Expanding educational opportunities for SWEP clients.*** The Commission pursued this poverty-report goal by meeting with Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory in August of 2014 where it was decided to form an Ad Hoc Suffolk Community College (SCCC) Committee to explore expanding educational opportunities for Suffolk Works Employment Program (SWEP) clients. Due to previous efforts by the Commission, the Suffolk County Department of Social Services (SCDSS) and Suffolk County Department of Labor (SCDOL), opportunities have been created for SWEP clients to attend SCCC while they are

also fulfilling their work requirement at SCCC. The Ad Hoc Committee is exploring expansion of this program to include more SWEP clients, at SCCC as well as Eastern Suffolk BOCES, along with the concept of creating “SWEP Hubs” at these sites with expanded delivery of multiple services such as work experience, vocational and job training and child care. A pilot for this expanded program will be launched in the spring of 2015 to run through December, 2017.

2. ***Recommendations about staffing levels at the SCDSS and SCDOL.*** The Commission’s poverty report highlighted the need for appropriate staffing at SCDSS and SCDOL. Following release of County Executive Bellone’s 2015 budget, the Commission consulted with SCDSS and SCDOL as well as with the Legislature’s Budget Review Office and found that staffing levels were adequate for these departments in the proposed budget.
3. ***Monitor the privatization of the County’s health centers.*** The Commission recognizes the potential benefits that might accrue from the county health centers being managed by Hudson River Health Care and thereby becoming Federally Qualified Health Centers. However, the Commission’s poverty report recommended that this process of privatizing the health centers be monitored to insure the delivery of quality services. The Commission therefore received occasional reports from Kimberly Gierasch who represents the Suffolk County Department of Health (SCDOH) on the Commission, and who reported that the transfer has thus far been moving smoothly.
4. ***Monitor Suffolk bus service as it relates to the needs of poor and near-poor people.*** The poverty report emphasized the need for expanded bus service. Working with Legislator Jay Schneiderman, the Commission helped draft and supported a November, 2014 legislative resolution to increase the non-East End bus fare by 25 cents to fund additional Sunday bus routes and extended evening service. Earlier in the year, the Commission wrote a letter to Governor Cuomo and State legislators supporting County Executive Bellone’s request for \$10 million in additional State funding for Suffolk bus service. Since this funding was not included in the State’s 2014 budget, the Commission will likely take up this issue again in 2015.
5. ***Score IDA applicants on their supports for working-poor people.*** The poverty report addressed one specific area involving jobs and wages – Suffolk Industrial Development Agency (IDA) grants and tax reductions that are given to companies in return for the promise that they will create jobs. The Commission drafted a scoring tool that the IDA could use to assess applications for IDA grants. The Scoring tool included such categories as: hiring union workers, minority contractors and local workers; paying the County living wage; prioritizing economically-stressed communities; providing child-care assistance to workers; providing on-the-job training; hiring Public Assistance recipients and long-term unemployed workers. It is the Commission’s hope that this scoring tool might provide a model for all IDAs to use in Suffolk County and would thereby raise the standard for IDA grants at both the town and County levels. The tool was not submitted to the Suffolk IDA in 2014 as requested by then IDA head Anthony Manetta, due to a change in leadership at the IDA. The scoring tool will be pursued with the new IDA leadership in 2015.

Child Care

Child Care Report: In June the Commission released a 90-page report, “Who’s Minding the Kids? Meeting Challenges and Creating Opportunities for Quality Child Care and Early Learning in Suffolk County” to county, state and federal officials, the child-care industry, academics and the public. The report received coverage in Newsday and other media. Written under the direction of the Commission’s Child Care Committee and with the assistance of prominent Long Island child-care and early-learning specialists and practitioners, the report drew from five focus groups for parents and providers and two public hearings conducted in late 2013. The hearings received eight hours of testimony from 18 government, agency, academic and industry experts as well as members of the public. A parent survey was developed and distributed, receiving 126 responses. The report contained perhaps the most comprehensive analysis ever developed of the child-care and early-learning delivery systems on Long Island along with recommendations to coordinate and improve the quality of these services. A centerpiece of the report’s recommendations is creation of a Suffolk County Child Care and Early Learning Commission that would oversee implementation of the report’s recommendations. This recommendation will be pursued in 2015.

CCBG Formula: The Commission continued to explore the State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) Child Care Block Grant (CCBG) formula that has underfunded Suffolk County child care since 2008. Analysis of this formula was part of the Commission’s 2014 child-care report. The Commission was disturbed by news that OCFS was increasing Suffolk’s 2014-2015 CCBG funding by only \$580,725 compared with an almost \$9 million CCBG increase in Nassau County, despite comparable child-care needs.

Employment Assessment and ADA Policies

The Commission continued to work with SCDSS and SCDOL toward improving mental-health and chemical-dependence assessments, compliance with the requirements of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) with the goal of improving work and educational placements and reducing the number of SCDSS client sanctions. With the leadership of Legislator Monica Martinez, Chair of the Legislature’s Human Services Committee, the ADA discussions moved to the County Executive’s offices toward the goal of creating a County-wide ADA policy that would then be tailored to the ADA needs of each County department. These discussions will continue in 2015. The Commission and SCDSS also agreed on the final wording for a “Did You Know?” flyer apprising clients of their ADA rights. This flyer will now be distributed to all SCDSS and SCDOL incoming clients.

Child Support

The Commission took up the issue federal and state child-support regulations that sometimes are disincentives for SCDOL clients to work, or even serve as parents. In November, the Commission heard a report on these disincentives from Linda Hassberg, an attorney with the Empire Justice Center who has expertise in child-support policies. Subsequently, the Commission formed an Ad Hoc Child Support Committee to discuss strategies for achieving

three priorities to make the Child Care regulations more flexible and responsive to clients' needs: (1) Lowering the State and/or federal 9% interest rate imposed when a non-custodial parent fails to meet the child-support requirements; (2) Improving the State's call-in center that often provides misinformation as well as their website which is difficult to navigate; (3) Possibly requesting a waiver for non-custodial parents to pay the principal only and not interest on their child support during the first 6 to 12 months of work, thereby incentivizing them to work and meet their parental responsibilities. The Committee will meet during 2015 to address these goals.

SCDSS Congregate Homeless Shelters

The Commission welcomed SCDSS opening two large-scale facilities to house families that had been in motels without any case management services and noted the enormous expense incurred by the County when homeless people are sheltered in motels. SCDSS reported to the Commission that these large-scale homeless facilities provide on-site services such as counseling and child care versus the virtually non-existing services provided to homeless families temporarily housed in motels. Thus homeless families are now receiving better services at a lower cost to the Suffolk county taxpayers. The Commission also was disappointed at the hostility directed toward the children housed in these facilities by residents of local school districts, such as Hauppauge. Concerned that there is widespread misunderstanding or ignorance about the requirements school districts have to enroll homeless children under the federal McKinney-Vento law, the Commission heard an extensive report on these requirements by Julia Schnurman, Eastern Suffolk BOCES McKinney-Vento liaison officer, at the February 7th meeting.

Conclusion

The Commission meets monthly, always with a quorum, and has created several committees that also meet to pursue issues such as the Suffolk Poverty Report Committee, Child Care Committee and Employment Assessment Committee. We look forward to working with the Legislature, SCDSS, SCDOL and SCDOH in 2015 to continue our mission to "evaluate and make recommendations of federal, State and county policies and procedures to move people from welfare to work."

Respectfully Submitted,

Legislator Monica Martinez, Chair, Human Services Committee
Richard Koubek, Ph.D., Commission Chair, Gerald Ryan Outreach Center
Kathy Liguori, Commission Vice Chair, Habitots Preschool and Child Care Centers

Marjorie Acevedo, For Presiding Officer DuWyane Gregory
Ayesha Alleyne, Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corporation
James Andrews, Suffolk County Department of Labor
Sr. Lisa Bergeron, Catholic Charities
Peggy Boyd, Family Service League

Steve Chassman, Long Island Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence
Barbara Egloff, Eastern Suffolk BOCES
Charles Fox, EOC of Suffolk County
Don Friedman, Empire Justice Center
Kimberly Gierasch, Suffolk County Department of Health
Michael Haynes, Long Island Cares/The Harry Chapin Food Bank
Ellen Krakow, Nassau/Suffolk Law Services
Nina Leonhardt, Suffolk County Community College
John Nieves, Suffolk County Department of Social Services
Ray O'Rourke, Suffolk County Workforce Investment Board
Michael Stoltz, Clubhouse of Suffolk
Joan Travan, Suffolk County Association of Municipal Employees
Luis Valenzuela, Long Island Council of Churches