

**Welfare to Work Commission  
Of the Suffolk County Legislature  
Minutes of the November 13, 2015 Meeting**

**Present:** Richard Koubek, Chair; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair; DSS Commissioner John O’Neill for Olga Ayeles; Lisa Pinkard for Leg. Monica Martinez, Ellen Krakow; Richard Krebs; Kathy Malloy; Charles Fox; Barbara Egloff; Kimberly Gierasch; Ayesha Alleyne; Don Friedman  
Peggy Boyd; Valerie Smith

**Excused:** Ray O’Rourke; Mike Stoltz; Nina Leonhardt; Mike Haynes; Sr. Lisa Bergeron; Luis Valenzuela;

**Absent:** Steve Chassman

**Guests:** Christina Maher, Suffolk AME; Frank Zambanini, Walter O’Connor, Gil Diaz, Rebuilding Long Island

1. **Minutes:** The October Commission meeting having been cancelled due to a heavy Commission committee meeting schedule, the minutes of the September meeting were approved unanimously on a motion by Kathy Liguori, seconded by Commissioner John O’Neill.
2. **Introduction of Valerie Smith:** Chair Richard Koubek welcomed Valerie Smith from the Office of Legislative Counsel who will now be representing the Presiding Officer on the Commission.
3. **Presentation by DSS Commissioner John O’Neill:** Mr. Koubek stated that the Commission will begin the process of setting its 2016 goals. In this context, Kathy Liguori recommended that DSS Commissioner John O’Neill present to the Commission his goals and priorities which might be folded into the Commission’s goals for 2106. Commissioner O’Neill then addressed these issues:
  - a. **Safety Net Cap:** Noting that the Commission had sent a letter to each County legislator opposing a proposed \$75 million cap on Safety Net (SN) contributions by the County, the Commissioner stated that such a cap cannot legally be imposed because this is a New York State mandated program. DSS will continue to serve all eligible SN clients. Mr. Koubek stated that the Commission’s letter offered to work with the County Executive and other county executives to reduce the 71% county SN contribution imposed several years ago back to 50%. The Commissioner outlined a number requests that have been filed with the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) that could reduce County SN costs such as charging back to TANF SN families with disabilities and SN singles.
  - b. **Housing:** The Commissioner reported that the lack of affordable housing in Suffolk – particularly affordable rental housing - has placed an enormous strain on low-income families, has increased the number of homeless people in Suffolk (now at almost 1,000 families and singles) and has strained DSS capacity to find *lower cost* emergency *shelters* and permanent *housing locations* for them. This lack of affordable housing stock has been exacerbated by the aftermath of

Hurricane Sandy, the economic collapse of 2008 and the high construction costs on Long Island.

- i. DSS now has five congregate care facilities but still needs to temporarily shelter about 135 homeless singles and families in motels. The Commissioner noted that DSS prefers transitional housing “resource centers” to emergency shelters where residents can receive multiple services such as educational counseling. *to transition clients to permanency thereby reducing the future need and/or reliance on temporary assistance.*
  - ii. In addition, the mentally ill who comprise a significant portion of the homeless population require distinct housing services which are not always available. DSS has *streamlined* the *permanency* application process and *housing* data base. *SC DSS is working with SC DOH to expedite mentally-ill homeless people accessing shelter through the Single Point of Access (SPOA) and using congregate care level 2/3 service providers, this has been slow but the Department is making progress..* In addition, DSS will be *circulating a request* for Qualifications (RFQs) for private agencies to create *discrete shelters for homeless people with mental illness similar to the Transitional Recovery Home RFQ for clients with substance abuse.* Mr. Koubek noted that the Commission recently narrowed its discussion of affordable housing to the housing needs of people with mental illness.
  - iii. Mr. Koubek noted that New York City is struggling with a rise in its homeless population and is experimenting with a new program that provides free legal services to help residents avoid eviction or foreclosure. The Commissioner stated that DSS does not have funding for this kind of program. Ellen Krakow reported that Nassau Suffolk Law Services has been providing this kind of free legal service for quite some time with State and federal funding..
  - iv. The Commissioner reported that DSS has been streamlining the cash security process. DSS again offers landlords cash security that is placed in escrow which is a major incentive for their accepting DSS clients. However, DSS inspectors now use an electronic tablet to record the physical status of each rental unit, thereby expediting landlord claims about damage to their property. DSS has also simplified the paperwork clients and landlords must complete.
- c. **Medicaid:** The Commissioner stated that the delivery of health care services since the enactment of Obamacare is undergoing major changes. Mr. Koubek noted that at a spring meeting, the Commission received a detailed summary of these changes which was presented by two representative of Hudson River Health Care which is now administering most of the County’s health care centers. The Commissioner stated that the State has assumed responsibility for administering a small portion of the County’s Medicaid caseload. He also note that the changes in the health care delivery system, with its emphasis on preventive care and integrated services though community-based organizations, offers much promise but needs to be carefully monitored.

- d. **2016 DSS Priorities:** Asked by Mr. Koubek what his 2016 priorities are, the Commissioner responded that his top priorities are: Safety Net services and expenses, housing for the mentally ill; the critical shortage of affordable rental housing *which delays Clients in finding affordable permanent locations to reside and to transition off temporary assistance.*
4. **SCCC Pilot Update:** Absent SCCC Ad Hoc Committee Chair Nina Leonhard, Mr. Koubek reported that the Committee held a conference call on November 5<sup>th</sup> to update the status of the pilot. During that call, Ms. Leonhardt stated that SCCC has applied for a grant which would provide funds for the SCCC child-care centers to remain open during the summer months, thereby possibly encouraging SWEP clients assigned to SCCC to use this service. The Committee also agreed to create a one-page flier outlining the pilot's opportunities for education, work and child care at SCCC. Tom Grecco from DSS has drafted a flier which is being finalized. Mr. Koubek also asked Richard Krebs during the conference call if it were possible to compare SCCC/SWEP placements in 2014 for the same period in 2015. Mr. Krebs stated at today's Commission meeting that, while the computer system keeps current but not historical data, he was able to put together an analysis of the two years. Mr. Krebs reported that SWEP placements at SCCC rose from 14 in 2014 to 32 in 2015. A total of seven clients used the SCCC child-care services. The 32 SWEP/SCCC placements in 2015 were: 14 in vocational education/work experience and 18 in jobs skills training/work study. Mr. Koubek stated that this 100% increase in placements indicated that the pilot is beginning to take hold.
5. **Suffolk Bus Cuts:** Mr. Koubek thanked the members of the Commission who responded to the October 20<sup>th</sup> electronic vote on the 2016 County budget letter to the Legislature appended below. Following the October 16, 2015 release of the Legislative Budget Review Office analysis of the proposed 2016 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 to each legislator opposing both proposals. The motion passed with an electronic vote on October 20, 2015: 14 Yes; 0 No; 1 Abstention (Don Friedman). Unfortunately, the Legislature adopted the \$10 million reduction in bus funds. Mr. Koubek stated that Welfare to Work, in coalition with bus advocacy organizations including Tri State Transportation Campaign, Vision Long Island and LI Jobs with Justice, understood that the County Executive is putting pressure on the State to provide the additional \$10 million in bus funds he has requested for the past several years. Advocacy will now concentrate on Long Island senators who will be urged to include the additional \$10 million in the State's 2016 budget. If this funding is not included, as many as ten Suffolk bus lines may be cut by the summer of 2016.
6. **Child Support Committee:** Mr. Koubek stated that on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, he received a call from David Gruenberg on behalf of Senator Flanagan in response to the Commission's letter requesting a lowering of the 9% interest rate charged for noncustodial parents who are in arrears of their child-support payments. Mr. Gruenberg is a counsel for the Republican Conference of the New York State Senate. Mr. Gruenberg said that the Commission's letter had generated quite a lot of discussion between Albany and the Senator's office. Mr. Gruenberg said that the Senator has political and legal concerns with our request but is open to discussion. They need empirical (rather than anecdotal) evidence that a significant number of noncustodial parents are abandoning work and/or their parental responsibilities as a result

of the 9% interest charged on child-support arrears. Mr. Krebs reported that there are no records kept as to whether non-custodial parents walk away from their parenting or work responsibilities as a result of the 9% interest rate. Mr. Koubek asked if DOL could compile a survey of DOL counselors who have witnessed this behavior. Mr. Krebs said he would attempt to do so. If the survey is obtained, a meeting with Senator Flanagan and Mr. Gruenberg will be requested.

7. **Legislation to Create a Child Care Committee:** Mr. Koubek distributed Introductory Resolution No. 1768-2015 to create a Suffolk County child-care commission that was introduced by Legislator Martinez and tabled on November 10<sup>th</sup>, pending further amendments. Noting that this was the first time the Commission members were able to see the actual resolution, Mr. Koubek stated that the Child Care Committee had met in conference call on October 15<sup>th</sup> to review the resolution after first receiving a copy of it, and that they also had some suggested amendments. Commissioner O'Neill stated that he too would like to see a few clauses amended. Lisa Pinkard announced that she would be setting up a meeting with the Commissioner, Mr. Koubek and Ms. Liguori to discuss further amendments. She noted that Legislator Kate Browning, Vice Chair of the Human Services Committee, expressed concern that the new commission might put pressure on the County to add funds that it does not have to child-care services. Mr. Koubek noted that the disparity between Nassau and Suffolk State Child Care Block Grant (CCBG) funding has been alleged to grow out of Nassau having dedicated in the past more county funds to child care than Suffolk has done. Commissioner O'Neill said that he thought there was a point when Nassau was using more county funds for child care, but he believes that has ended. The eligibility for the State CCBG child-care subsidy in Nassau has been reduced from 275% to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) as Nassau has reduced its county contribution. The Suffolk CCBG eligibility is 160% of FPL. However, he stated, the flawed State formula that looks back five years to county child-care expenditures, continues to reward Nassau for its past contributions. Mr. Koubek stated that county funding is clearly an issue that needs to be addresses as the child-care commission resolution moves forward.
8. **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.
9. **Presentation: Rebuilding Together Long Island:** Mr. Koubek introduced Frank Zambanini from Rebuilding together Long Island, the Long Island affiliate of a national nonprofit organization that uses volunteers to restore and renew homes owned by low-income residents. The Long Island chapter assists, free-of-charge, about 120 homeowners per year with plumbing, heating and other repairs. Mr. Koubek suggested that Mr. Zambanini provide him with a summary of the program that he will distribute to each legislator. Ms. Pinkard noted that Mr. Zamabnini's organization could be scheduled for a presentation before the Human Services Committee.
10. **Announcements:** Charles Fox announced that EOC is holding a veteran's job fair on November 17<sup>th</sup>.
11. **Next Meeting:** The next meeting will be on Friday, December 11th, 9:30AM.

### **Letter to the Legislature Regarding the 2016 Budget Propopsal**

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