

**Welfare to Work Commission  
Of the Suffolk County Legislature  
Minutes of the September 12, 2014 Meeting**

**Present:** Richard Koubek, Chair; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair; Lisa Pinkard for Leg. Monica Martinez, Dennis Nowak for John Nieves; Richard Krebs for James Andrews; Marjorie Acevedo; Jacky Horsley for Ray O'Rourke; Ayesha Alleyne; Charles Fox; Nina Leonhardt; Michael Haynes; Luis Valenzuela; Barbara Egloff

**Excused:** Sr. Lisa Bergeron; Joan Travan; Ellen Krakow; Don Friedman; Michael Stoltz; Kimberly Gierasch; Rob Greenberger; Peggy Boyd; Gwen O'Shea; Steve Chassman

**Guest:** Tracy Barnes, DSS

1. **Minutes:** Chair Richard. Koubek reminded the Commission that the August meeting was cancelled due to that month's heavy schedule of Commission committee meetings. The minutes of the July meeting were tabled because copies were not available.
2. **IDA Scoring Tool:** Mr. Koubek reported that the incoming head of the IDA, Robert Stricoff, has temporarily stepped aside. Consequently, the discussion with the IDA about the IDA scoring tool will again be postponed.
3. **Employment Assessment Committee:** Mr. Koubek noted that Ellen Krakow and Don Friedman were both away at a conference, but in their absence, he reported that they have completed an extensive analytical comparison of the DSS and Commission ADA policies which will be presented to Legislator Monica Martinez on September 22<sup>nd</sup>. The hope is that Legislator Martinez will then arrange for a meeting with Commissioner John O'Neill and other DSS staff to discuss the ADA policy.
4. **Change in the Commission's Name:** Mr. Koubek reported that Legislator Martinez remains interested in changing the Commission's name. This issue was tabled until she can be present for the discussion.
5. **Child Care Committee:**
  - a. Chair Kathy Liguori reported that she, Mr. Koubek, Janet Walerstein of the Child Care Council of Suffolk and Dana Friedman of the Early Years Institute, presented the Commission's child-care report to the Human Services Committee on July 22<sup>nd</sup>. The presentation lasted about one hour. There was much interest in the report expressed by several committee members. Legislator Lou D'Amaro led an extensive discussion of early learning as a public-education responsibility that should be funded by the State Education Department. He also questioned whether there should be another commission created, as the report recommended for child care. She told Ms. Liguori that although this is not her area of expertise in her role as Regional Manager, she had different information and believed that Suffolk County had done a "great thing" by putting money into their own child-care budget but in so doing created a "rainy day fund" with its allocation. Ms. Liguori confirmed that there was indeed a misconception and we had a different perspective. We did not have a rainy day fund, we had a rollover at a certain period but that money was used appropriately. The data used for the report were

obtained from written correspondence between OCFS, Sheila Poole and our Commissioners.

- i. Mr. Koubek noted that he had spoken with Rita Ciolli who chairs the Newsday editorial board regarding possible editorial coverage of the report. Ms. Ciolli said that the CCBG issue remains unresolved and that Newsday will not likely run an editorial until differences between Suffolk County and OCFS are addressed about the CCBG.
  - ii. Ms. Liguori reiterated that this issue may have resulted in the discrepancy between Nassau receiving about \$9 million in 2014-2015 CCBG funds while Suffolk received only about \$600,000. Mr. Koubek stated that he and Ms. Liguori have met with Robert Lipp and Diane Dono of the legislative Budget Review Office to discuss what data might be needed to assess the differences in the CCBG grants to both counties. Ms. Liguori and Mr. Koubek suggested that a meeting with Ms. Beller be arranged to address her inquiries with regard to the report's data.
  - iii. Dennis Nowak of the DSS Family and Children's Services Division that manages the CCBG subsidies questioned the need for addressing with Ms. Beller her differences with the data. He recommended that the Commission take a proactive and forward-looking approach by backing Commissioner O'Neill's proposed alternatives to OCFS for updating the CCBG allocation methodology to more truly reflect the county's current child care needs. He noted that the discrepancy between Nassau County's allocation and Suffolk's is not due to a difference in data between Suffolk and OCFS but to the allocation methodology and the change in the OCFS look back period from four to five years. The Commission reached consensus, however, that a meeting with Ms. Beller could be constructive.
- b. Dennis Nowak distributed an amended version of the proposal, submitted at the July Commission meeting by attorney David Welch, to phase out the CCBG subsidy rather than have a fixed cap that causes working-poor parents to lose their subsidy if they exceed the cap by even a few dollars. The revised chart added columns for the parent fee, the federal child tax credit and provided data on the State Income Standard for determining the Federal Poverty Level. In essence, the added columns indicated additional supports that working-poor families receive, such as the tax credit, which could help offset the loss of the CCBG subsidy. A number of Commission members again noted that phasing out the CCBG subsidy would reduce the total revenues available and might lead to a waiting list for new applicants. Mr. Nowak remarked that a phased out reduction in the subsidy would result in higher income recipients remaining eligible for child care subsidies longer but could also exhaust the County's limited CCBG funds faster. This would cause the County to reduce the income standard for subsidies and prevent lower income applicants from reaching eligibility. Mr. Nowak stated that the County needs to stay focused on its goal of raising the income standard so that more families would be eligible for subsidies. Mr. Koubek and Ms. Liguori thanked DSS for their diligence in preparing these data for the Commission.

- c. Ms. Liguori announced that she will reconvene the Child Care Committee to discuss the entire CCBG issue.
6. **DSS Staffing:** Mr. Koubek reported that, prior to the current meeting, he asked John Nieves to provide the Commission with an update of current DSS staffing. Mr. Koubek supplied Mr. Nieves with a template of a previous report received from DSS several years ago showing caseloads and staffing. Traci Barnes from DSS distributed current statistics, based on this template, of 2013 and 2014 (through August) DSS staffing levels and vacancies. Ms. Barnes said that there is a "no layoff" clause in the Association of Municipal Employees (AME) contract and that overall DSS staffing seems adequate. Staff were reassigned to areas (SNAP) where caseloads have increased from areas (Medicaid) where caseloads decreased. She said that vacancies are about "normal" – consistent with past years. A number of Commission members noted that there are still three months remaining in the 2014 staffing cycle, that the filled positions in 2014 compared with 2013 are down and that vacancies seem high, but that some vacancies may be filled (per usual) in the last quarter. Mr. Koubek noted that DSS expressed satisfaction with the proposed staffing levels released in the Recommended 2013 County Executive's budget but that the legislative Budget Review Office analysis of the County Executive's budget found serious shortfalls in staffing. With release of the 2015 budget due around September 17<sup>th</sup>, Mr. Koubek stated that the Commission should take a careful look at DSS staffing levels in the budget. He thanked Ms. Barnes and DSS for their diligence in providing the data to the Commission.
7. **SCCC Proposal:** Mr. Koubek reminded the Commission that, when Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory attended the April 25th meeting, the Commission offered to help him with his goal of making Suffolk County Community College (SCCC) more accessible to welfare clients. A delegation from the Commission met with the Presiding Officer on August 1st where it was decided to work toward expanding opportunities for DSS/DOL clients to attend SCCC while they use it as a work site. Nina Leonhardt noted that about 30-35 SWEP clients are currently enrolled at SCCC where they are also fulfilling their work assignment. These are not Work Study program students who are paid via federal funds nor are they non-paid Work Experience program students. Following discussion of this proposal, the Commission reached consensus to form an Ad Hoc SCCC Committee for the purpose of expanding the SWEP placements at SCCC. Nina Leonhardt agreed to chair the committee. Mr. Koubek stated that he would invite any Commission member not present at today's meeting to serve on the committee. Those present who volunteered to be on the committee were:
  - a. Nina Leonhardt, Chair
  - b. Marge Acevido (PO's office)
  - c. Richard Krebs (DOL)
  - d. James Andrews (DOL, recommended by Richard Krebs)
  - e. Barbara Egloff (Eastern Suffolk BOCES)
  - f. Charles Fox (EOC-Suffolk)
  - g. Ayesha Alleyne (WHPDC)
  - h. Jackie Horsley (WIOA)
  - i. Kathy Liguori (WtW Vice Chair)
  - j. Richard Koubek (WtW Chair)

8. **Next Meeting:** The next meeting will be October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 9:30 AM in Conference Room A of the SDOL One Stop Center.