

**Welfare to Work Commission
Of the Suffolk County Legislature
Minutes of the July 11th, 2014 Meeting**

Present: Richard Koubek, Chair; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair; Dennis Nowak for John Nieves; James Andrews; Jacky Horsley for Ray O'Rourke; Ayesha Alleyne; Charles Fox; Nina Leonhardt; Sr. Lisa Bergeron; Rob Greenberger; Michael Haynes; Don Friedman; Joan Travan; Luis Valenzuela

Excused: Legislator Monica Martinez; Ellen Krakow; Michael Stoltz; Kimberly Gierasch; Marjorie Acevedo; Peggy Boyd; Gwen O'Shea; Barbara Egloff; Steve Chassman

Guest: David Welch, Esq.

1. **New Member:** Chair Richard Koubek introduced Ayesha Alleyne who will be representing Wyandanch Homes an Property Development Corporation on the Commission.
2. **Minutes:** The minutes of the June 6th meeting were adopted unanimously on a motion by Kathy Liguori, seconded by James Andrews.
3. **Child Care Committee:** Mr. Koubek announced that media coverage for the release of the Commission's child-care report was excellent: News 12 and Newsday provided major stories. He also reported that the child-care report will be presented to the Legislature's Human Services Committee at 2PM on July 22nd. In addition, Jennifer Casey presented a brief summary of the report at the July Suffolk County Planning Commission meeting. The report has also been sent to the Newsday editorial board. Other committee presentations will be considered.
 - a. Mr. Koubek introduced David Welch, an attorney who attended the November Rainbow Chimes parent focus group. Mr. Welch was upset at the "benefits cliff" which forces parents to lose their entire child-care subsidy if they exceed the cap, even by a small dollar amount. Mr. Welch suggested at that focus group a phasing out or tiered eligibility system similar that is used by other social services programs which he deal with in his law practice. His suggestion became one of the recommendations in the report. DSS agreed with commission members who expressed concerns that a tiered eligibility system could reduce the availability of the CCBG funds and the number of children served and suggested further research and assessment of the plan before proposing such a system to the NYS Office of Family and Children's Services (OCFS). Mr. Welch distributed a spreadsheet with a proposed tiered eligibility system for the NYS Child Care Block Grant (CCBG) child-care subsidy provided to working poor families earning up to 165% of the Federal Poverty Level in Suffolk County. He stated that an "eligibility cliff" is a disincentive to work. Mr. Welch used the Internal Revenue Service as an analogy to illustrate that eligibility for the CCBG subsidy could gradually move people off the program as they earn more income rather than completely dropping them when they exceed the cap.
 - b. There ensued a detailed discussion of Mr. Welch's proposal and spreadsheet. James Andrews asked if an employer's contribution to an employee's child care

should be factored into the tiered system. Dennis Nowak Division Administrator for DSS Family & Children's Services, which includes the DSS Child Care Unit, noted that DSS has reduced the parent contribution from 30% to 20%. He stated that there should be an additional column to the spreadsheet that factors in the parent contribution. He noted that parent contribution essentially creates a graduated cutoff from the child-care subsidy – the more they earn, the more they contribute until the loss of eligibility at the threshold. Kathy Liguori stated that tiered eligibility should apply to both TANF and Non-TANF (working-poor) families. Don Friedman pointed out that some families have been subject to a double penalty as they earn more income: loss of Public Assistance and loss of the child-care subsidy. One Commission member asked if the tiered system might reduce overall CCBG funds and cause some families to lose their subsidy or be placed on a waiting list. Mr. Nowak stated that there is no waiting list at the present time and confirmed that a tiered system could reduce the availability of CCBG funds, the number of children served, and possibly the child-care income threshold.

- c. Several Commission members again raised the disparity in the 2014-2105 NYS OCFS/CCBG funding increases between Suffolk County (a \$600,000 increase) and Nassau County (a \$9 million increase.) Mr. Andrews again stated that Nassau's apparent use of more county funds than Suffolk for child care might be at the expense of other programs such as emergency housing which, in Suffolk, are given a higher priority.
- d. Mr. Friedman reminded the Commission that funding for child care at both the federal and State levels of government is inadequate and that a tiered eligibility system could cause more families to lose their CCBG subsidy. He noted that the Rauch Foundation is studying this problem. Mr. Koubek stated that he and Ms. Liguori participated in a conference call in the late spring regarding an academic study being conducted on how the CCBG formula and funding affects each county in New York State.

Mr. Koubek stated that Legislator Monica Martinez has expressed an interest in sponsoring the legislation that will create the Child Care and Early Learning Commission as recommended in the child-care report. The Commission next brainstormed possible seats that could be assigned in the legislation to this new commission. Among the suggestions were:

- a. Chair of the Legislature's Human Services Committee or his/her representative
- b. DSS Child Care unit
- c. Welfare to Work Commission
- d. Child Care Council of Suffolk
- e. Early Years Institute
- f. SC Department of Health, Preschool Services Division
- g. Head Start
- h. Suffolk BOCES
- i. Suffolk Superintendent of Schools Association
- j. NYSUT (the teacher's union)
- k. CSEA (the union that represents the home-care providers)
- l. Suffolk County Community College - Early Childhood Education Department

- m. EOC-Suffolk (which has the only Suffolk child-care center that specializes in DSS children)
 - n. Long Island Association (for business input)
 - o. Rauch Foundation (they research child care issues)
 - p. A parent
 - q. A licensed/registered provider
 - r. A provider for special-needs pre-school children
 - s. A private company that provides on-site child care
 - t. Stony Brook University (department to be determined)
4. **Employment Assessment Committee:** Mr. Koubek reported that Legislator Martinez and her aide, Lisa Pinkard were unable to attend today's meeting because they are moving into their new office. He reported that Legislator Martinez met with DSS Commissioner John O'Neill and Tom Grecco, head of the DSS Client Benefits Division, regarding the Commission's proposed ADA policy. Legislator Martinez reported that there is some room for compromise between DSS and the Commission. She also reported that the County Attorney stated that the Commission should receive a copy of the SCDSS/ADA policy which will be transmitted to members of the Employment Assessment Committee. A meeting with Legislator Martinez, Lisa Pinkard and the Committee will be scheduled later in July to compare the Commission and SCDSS ADA policies, followed by a meeting with DSS administrators to discuss possibly combining aspects of each policy.
 5. **IDA Scoring Tool:** Mr. Koubek reported that David Calone, Chair of the Suffolk County Planning Commission, contacted him about the soon-to-be-announced new President of Suffolk County's IDA. When the new President takes office, Mr. Calone will pursue the Commission's IDA scoring tool.
 6. **Change in the Commission's Name:** Mr. Koubek reported on a conversation he had with Legislator Martinez regarding their mutual dislike of the Commission's "Welfare to Work" name. Mr. Koubek stated that his dislike of the name is rooted in the stereotypes contained in the 1996 welfare reform act which suggests that welfare recipients do not want to work. He asked Commission members to comment on whether they would like a new name. Rob Greenberger and a number of other Commission members stated that the Commission is "branded" with this name and changing the name could create confusion or even a loss of status. James Andrews noted that the name fits the mission of the Commission as outlined in the legislation that created it. Kathy Liguori noted that a brand change can be exciting and open new opportunities. Seeing no consensus on whether to change the name or any suggested new name, Mr. Koubek asked all to think about this issue that will be raised again at a future meeting.
 7. **Child Support:** Mr. Andrews reported that many of the male clients he deals with at DOL are burdened by restrictive state and federal child-care rules and requirements that discourage them from working. He suggested that the Commission take up this issue. Don Friedman stated that Empire Justice has done some work on this subject and that it might make for a good discussion at a future meeting, perhaps with a presentation by one of the Empire Justice attorneys who has been involved in this work. Mr. Koubek stated that this should be considered for a future meeting agenda.

8. **Next Meeting:** Mr. Koubek stated that the August meeting is likely to be cancelled due to the heavy schedule of committee meetings in August. The next meeting will be September 12th.