

Suffolk County Legislature



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WELFARE TO WORK COMMISSION
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April 2017

To: Members of the Suffolk County Legislature:

The Welfare to Work Commission is pleased to provide you with our 2016 annual report as well as our 2017 Commission goals. As you can see in the attached report, the Commission was again very active in 2016, with these activities:

1. Continuing to pursue these goals in our 2012 report, "Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County":
 - a. Making recommendations on staffing levels at SCDSS and SCDOLL&CA.
 - b. Monitoring the privatization of the County's health centers.
 - c. Supporting Suffolk County bus service.
2. Expanding educational opportunities for SWEP clients by creating a pilot for the delivery of coordinated SWEP work experience, training and education and child-care services at Suffolk County Community College.
3. Supporting the newly-created Suffolk County Child Care Commission.
4. Continuing to advocate for a change in the State's child-care funding formula that underfunds Suffolk County's child-care needs.
5. Supporting efforts to develop a County "Americans with Disabilities Act" policies and procedures.
6. Identifying County policies to remove disincentives to work from parents who are required to pay child support.
7. Exploring supportive housing options for people with behavioral health challenges

The Welfare to Work Commission generally meets monthly, sometimes more often through our committees, always with a quorum. All Commission members are volunteers who, individually or through their agencies, contribute hundreds of hours toward creating policies and practices that support people leaving welfare for work as well as working-poor people in Suffolk.

Yours truly for the Commission,

Richard Koubek

Richard Koubek, PhD, Chair

Kathy Liguori

Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair



Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature

2016 Annual Report And 2017 Goals

April 2017

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 2017 and a summary of its activities for 2016.

Welfare to Work Commission's 2017 Goals

1. Continue pursue these goals in the Commission's 2012 report, "Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County":
 - 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, Licensing and Consumer Affairs (SCDOLL&CA) and Suffolk County Department of Health (SCDOH).
 - b. Receive updates on 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 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 inadequate

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 County Community College toward the goal of creating SCDSS and SCDOLL&CA “hub centers” for the delivery of multiple SWEP services, including work experience, education, training and child care.
4. Monitor changes in federal TANF law and policy that may be implemented by the Trump Administration with special attention to education and training opportunities for SWEP clients.
5. Continue supporting adoption and refinement of Suffolk County and SCDSS “Americans with Disabilities Act” (ADA) policies and procedures. In addition:
 - a. Clarify and monitor the status of the nonprofit liaison communication lines crafted in 2012 by the Commission’s Employment Assessment Committee in cooperation with SCDSS and SCDOLL&CA.
6. Explore barriers to housing for Suffolk residents with behavioral health challenges and release a report to the Suffolk County Legislature on this topic.
7. Assess the impact of the opioid epidemic on communities/people of lower socioeconomic status with special attention to the effects on children and young people.

Activities Pursuant to the Commission’s 2016 Goals

Pursue Recommendations in the “Struggling in Suburbia” Report

The Commission continued to pursue these recommendations in our 2012 poverty report, “Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County,”

1. ***Expand educational opportunities for SWEP clients.*** The Commission pursued this poverty-report goal through the work of its Ad Hoc Suffolk Community College (SCCC) Committee. Due to previous efforts by the Commission, the Suffolk County Department of Social Services (SCDSS) and Suffolk County Department of Labor, Licensing and Consumer Affairs (SCDOLL&CA), opportunities have been created for Suffolk Works Employment Program (SWEP) clients to attend SCCC while they are also fulfilling their work requirement at SCCC. The Ad Hoc Committee expanded this program along with the concept of creating an “SWEP Hub” at SCCC with expanded delivery of multiple services such as work experience, vocational and job training and child care. A pilot for this expanded program was launched in the spring of 2015 and was continued into the Spring and Fall semesters of 2016. The pilot will continue to be monitored in 2017.
2. ***Recommendations about staffing levels at the SCDSS and SCDOLL&CA.*** The Commission’s poverty report highlighted the need for appropriate staffing at SCDSS and SCDOLL&CA. Following release of County Executive Bellone’s 2017 budget, the Commission consulted with SCDSS and SCDOLL&CA as well as with the Legislature’s Budget Review Office and found that proposed staffing levels were inadequate for SCDSS in the proposed budget due to a \$1.5 million reduction. This reduction was considered especially burdensome since it would have resulted in the

eligibility for subsidized child care being reduced from 125 percent to 100 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). The Commission therefore voted to send a letter to the Suffolk County Legislature calling for a restoration of the \$1.5 for SCDSS as well as restoration of Public Health Nurses and elimination of a 1 percent administrative fee for County contracts. Each of these recommendations was adopted by the Legislature in the 2017 budget.

3. **Monitor the privatization of the County's health centers.** The Commission periodically received updates from SCDOH on the status of the County health centers, which were found to be providing adequate services.
4. **Monitor Suffolk bus service as it relates to the needs of poor and near-poor people.** The Commission's poverty report emphasized the need for expanded bus service. Upon learning that the proposed 2017 County budget would eliminate 8 bus lines, the Commission sent a letter to the Legislature in September and again in October requesting that the reductions be delayed until a demographic study of riders as well as a rerouting plan be published. The bus line eliminations went into effect in December of 2016. The Commission will monitor their impact throughout 2017 while calling for more State transportation funding for Suffolk County.
5. **Score IDA applicants on their supports for working-poor people.** In 2014, 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 will be submitted to the IDA in 2017.

Child Care

1. **Child Care Commission:** The Welfare to Work Commission holds a seat on the Suffolk County Child Care Commission and receives monthly reports of its activities. The Child Care Commission is planning a summit for May of 2017. Commission members Richard Koubek and Kathy Liguori are participating in the planning of this summit.
2. **CCBG Formula:** The Commission continued to assess the State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) Child Care Block Grant (CCBG) formula that has underfunded Suffolk County child care since 2008.
 - a. **The inadequate CCBG formula:** In December the Commission heard a report by Jennifer Rojas of the Child Care Council of Suffolk. Ms. Rojas stated that the State formula for allocating Federal CCBG funds has not adequately met the child-care needs of Suffolk County residents who live at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Current Suffolk County eligibility for the CCBG subsidy is at 125% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), which is one of the lower rates in the State. Except for families of children with special needs, a family of four would have to earn \$30,375 or less to qualify for the

subsidy, which is well below the recommended eligibility of 200% of FPL. As the Commission, DSS, the County Executive and Legislature have stated over the years, Ms. Rojas reiterated that the New York State Office of Family and Children's Services (OCFS) uses an inadequate formula based on a five-year lookback at past spending rather than at need (e.g. share of young children in families earning under 200% of FPL) as is done by the Federal government.

- b. **State Special Incentive Fund proposal:** Ms. Rojas presented a proposal for a State Special Incentive Fund under which the State would create a temporary two year Special Incentive Fund of approximately \$5 million a year for the six large counties – Suffolk being one - unable to meet the needs of child-care families of low-income working families earning less than 200% of FPL. These counties must have populations in excess of 450,000 and have experienced a positive population growth rate of at least 1% based on census data. Under this proposal the Special Incentive Fund also would count in the NYS OCFS allocation methodology, which will help counties sustain the necessary funding without the Special Incentive Fund going forward. The Commission voted to support this proposal in a letter to Governor Andrew Cuomo. Subsequently, each member of the Suffolk County Legislature signed a letter of support to the Governor as well. This proposal will be monitored during the 2017 State legislative session.

ADA Policies

Discussions for a County ADA policy moved from the Welfare to Work Commission to the County Executive's offices in 2015. A draft County ADA policy has been developed and is being negotiated by interested parties. The Commission will monitor these discussions throughout 2017.

Child Support

In 2014, the Commission took up the issue federal and State child-support regulations that sometimes are disincentives for SCDOLL&CA clients to work, or even serve as parents. In 2015, the Commission's Ad Hoc Child Support Committee discussed strategies to make the Child Care regulations more flexible and responsive to clients' needs. In March of 2016, SCDSS staff from the Child Support Unit met with the Commission and announced that, on a case-by-case basis, SCDSS can discuss the possibility of reducing SCDSS arrears with any low-income, non-custodial parent (NCP). It was reported that this outreach has produced a 41% success rate and that over \$300,000 in adjustments to NCP arrears payments have been made. These adjustments include reducing DSS arrears, lowering the monthly payments and extending the payment period so that the payments are less burdensome by being spread over time. SCDSS staff also agreed to offer a grace period before the arrears payments begin once an NCP has found work or offering a period of time in which no interest is accrued with payments applied solely to the interest arrears principal. The

Commission was informed that Suffolk County DSS has one of the highest child-support collection rates in New York State.

Supportive Housing Work Group

In the fall of 2015, the Commission revisited its 2007 report on the lack of affordable housing in Suffolk County, noting that little has been accomplished providing safe, affordable housing for very-low income residents earning under 50% of the Area Median Income. This housing vacuum was found to be especially onerous for people with behavioral health challenges, especially those who are chronically homeless. The Commission created a Supportive Housing Work Group that met with stakeholders throughout 2016. Among the topics covered by the Work group were:

1. Identifying the unserved and underserved homeless population.
2. Profiling the chronically homeless population.
3. Exploring the Continuum of Care network of services for the homeless.
4. Assessing the “Housing First” model for sheltering homeless people.
5. Assessing the SPOA system for providing housing to people with behavioral health challenges.
6. Identifying innovative programs to serve the homeless, including: Community Housing Innovations’ “Transitional Housing Program”; Family Service League’s “TLC Emergency Housing Program”; Concern for Independent Living housing options; tiny homes.

The Supportive Housing Work Group will continue to meet in 2017 with the goal of releasing a report, with recommendations, to the Suffolk County Legislature.

Conclusion

The Commission meets monthly, always with a quorum, and has created several committees that also meet to pursue issues such as the Supportive Housing Work Group. We look forward to working with the Legislature, SCDSS, SCDOLL&CA and SCDOH in 2017 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, Education and Human Services Committee
Richard Koubek, Ph.D., Commission Chair, Gerald Ryan Outreach Center
Kathy Liguori, Commission Vice Chair, Habitots Preschool and Child Care Centers

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Sr. Lisa Bergeron, Catholic Charities
Peggy Boyd, Family Service League
Christina DeLisi, For Presiding Officer DuWyane Gregory
Barbara Egloff, Eastern Suffolk BOCES
Charles Fox, EOC of Suffolk County
Don Friedman, Empire Justice Center
Kimberly Gierasch, Suffolk County Department of Health

Greta Guarton, Long Island Coalition for the Homeless
Michael Haynes, Long Island Cares/The Harry Chapin Food Bank
Ellen Krakow, Nassau/Suffolk Law Services
Richard Krebs, Suffolk County Department of Labor, Licensing and Consumer Affairs
Nina Leonhardt, Suffolk County Community College
Christian Limbach, Suffolk County Association of Municipal Employees
John O'Neill, Commissioner, Suffolk County Department of Social Services
Jeffrey Reynolds, Family and Children's Association/LICADD
Rachel Seiler, Community Development Corporation of Long Island
Michael Stoltz, Clubhouse of Suffolk
Luis Valenzuela, Long Island Council of Churches