

**Welfare to Work Commission  
Of the Suffolk County Legislature**

**Minutes of the September 8, 2017 Meeting**

**Present:**

Richard Koubek, Chair  
Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair  
Peggy Boyd (Family Service League);;  
Christina DeLisi (Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory)  
Barbara Egloff (Eastern Suffolk BOCES)  
Charles Fox (EOC-LI)  
Michael Haynes (LI Cares/Harry Chapin Food Bank)  
Ellen Krakow (Nassau/Suffolk Law Services)  
Richard Krebs, (SC Department of Labor)  
Christian Limbach (SC Association of Municipal Employees)  
Commissioner John O'Neill (SC Department of Social Services)  
Jeffrey Reynolds (Family and Children's Association/LICADD)  
Michael Stoltz (Association for Mental Health and Wellness)  
Luis Valenzuela (LI Council of Churches)

**Excused:**

Ayesha Alleyne (Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corporation); Sr. Lisa Bergeron (Catholic Charities); Barbara DeFina (Suffolk County Community College); Don Friedman (Empire Justice Center); Kim Gierasch (Suffolk County Department of Health); Greta Guarton (LI Coalition for the Homeless); Lisa Pinkard for Legislator Monica Martinez

**Absent:**

Rachel Seiler (Community Development Corporation of LI)

**Guests:** Legislator Kate Browning; Joshua Slaughter, Legislative Aide to Kate Browning; Vincent Rothaar, SCDSS; Lauren McNamara, New Hope Rising

1. **Minutes:** Chair Richard Koubek reminded the Commission that the August meeting was cancelled due to conflicts with Commission committee meetings. The July minutes were tabled for consideration at the next meeting.
2. **Sober Homes:** Mr. Koubek welcomed the members of the Suffolk County Sober Homes Oversight Board to this joint meeting to update the status of sober homes in Suffolk County. He provided a summary of the major findings from the Commission's 2010 report on sober homes, noting that the New York State Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) continues to not regulate sober homes, alleging that their residents have completed treatment and therefore do not fall under the Department's aegis. Dr. Jeffrey Reynolds stated that OASAS does not consider sober homes to be part of their treatment continuum. He added that OASAS argues that it does not have the staff to monitor sober homes. Mr. Koubek reiterated that residents of sober homes are protected by the federal Americans with Disabilities Act and therefore are insulated from local housing ordinances that single them out for what might be construed as discriminatory regulations. Mr. Koubek noted that the 2010 Commission report recommended creation of a Sober Homes Oversight Board, which was accomplished,

State legislation requiring OASS to regulate sober homes which has not been adopted and a pilot DSS project of enhanced payments to sober homes that comply with higher standards of regulation, which has been implemented. The report also called for OASAS to implement supportive living services housing on Long Island that might serve as sober homes. However, Dr. Reynolds noted that such housing is very expensive and may have standards of care neither needed nor desired by sober homes residents.

- a. **The DSS Pilot:** Commissioner John O'Neil and Josh Slaughter described the pilot which now has two sober homes operated by Community Housing Innovations and Brighter Tomorrows that each receives an enhanced DSS rate of \$962 per resident per month in return for complying with regulations. Among these regulations are on-site management, curfews, random inspections and other criteria to maintain an alcohol and drug free environment. Commissioner O'Neill emphasized that the rate is for DSS clients only who comprise 15 percent of the sober homes population. He stated that one of the sober homes has eight females and the other has 10 males; the homes are at 95 percent capacity. Legislator Kate Browning said that at the end of two years, DSS will conduct a study of outcomes. Commissioner O'Neill noted that all costs of the pilot project sober homes are not compensated by State funding, however the lower anticipated recidivism rates among residents will make the pilot cost effective by avoiding future expensive County outlays such as emergency shelters or prisons.
- b. **New Hope Rising:** Lauren McNamara described the three New Hope Rising private-pay (\$850 per month) sober homes in Mastic and Shirley. These homes have high levels of care. Residents' self-sufficiency is their highest priority. Legislator Browning noted that she has visited all three homes and attested to their high quality. Ms. McNamara pointed out that OASAS does not oversee their program.
- c. **Suffolk Oversight:** Mr. Slaughter noted that the Sober Homes Oversight Board is hoping to create a list of acceptable sober homes like New Hope Rising as well as a list of substandard sober homes that will be made available to treatment providers who often seek housing for their clients. Commissioner O'Neill pointed out that DSS is legally permitted to inspect sober homes with DSS clients only for health and safety standards such as the lack of fire or CO2 detectors, egresses that are blocked or the lack of heat and running water. He noted that DSS has between 200 and 400 homes (sober homes, emergency shelters and transitional housing) to inspect but has only three inspectors. Towns and villages can also conduct inspections based on health and safety. However, neither the County nor the towns and villages can impose special regulations on sober homes, which would be a violation of the federal ADA.
- d. **State Oversight:** Mike Stoltz asked if there has been a survey of unmet needs. Mr. Slaughter stated that the Sober Homes Oversight Board sent a survey to treatment providers which showed that 800 of their clients require some level of transitional housing. Mr. Stoltz stated that the County needs to delineate the levels of care required and the unmet needs. Mr. Koubek suggested, and consensus was reached, that the Welfare to Work Commission and the Sober Homes Oversight Board should request a meeting with Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan to advocate for State legislation that would require OASAS oversight of sober homes. Mr. Slaughter stated that Florida has sober homes regulatory legislation that could be a model. Legislator Browning agreed to try to set up this meeting with Senator Flanagan.

3. **Supportive Housing Work Group:** Mr. Koubek stated that the work continues to meet. It is crafting recommendations to be included in their report to the Legislature which may be ready by the end of 2017 or early in 2018.
4. **Public Hearing on Federal Social Welfare Funding Reductions:** Mr. Koubek reported that the Federal Budget Public Hearing Ad Hoc Committee held an August 16th conference call which concluded that the public hearing should be held in consultation with Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory. Legislator Gregory spoke with Mr. Koubek on August 24<sup>th</sup> at which time he supported the hearing and suggested that it be held the week before the County Legislature's 2018 budget hearings. To expedite planning for the hearing, Mr. Koubek scheduled an August 29<sup>th</sup> electronic vote on a motion by Jeff Reynolds, seconded by Ellen Krakow, for the Welfare to Work Commission to hold a public hearing on Tuesday, October 10th, on the impacts that proposed federal budget cuts may have on Suffolk County social-welfare programs. The motion carried: Yes: 15; No: 1; Abstentions: 1 (Kim Gierasch). A letter of invitation to testify at the hearing was approved by the Ad Hoc Committee and post mailed by the Clerk of the Legislature during the first week of September to every Suffolk contract agency. DSS, DOL and DOH Commissioners also received invitations to testify as did Congressmen Lee Zeldin, Peter King and Thomas Suozzi who represent Suffolk. Members of the Commission were asked to mark their calendars for the hearing, Tuesday, October 10<sup>th</sup>, 10AM-2PM in the Hauppauge legislative auditorium. The Commission brainstormed a number of possible opening speakers including Don Freidman of the Empire Justice Center, Legislative BRO Director Rob Lipp, and Hofstra University's Lawrence Levy or Gail Prudenti.
5. **Announcements:**
  - a. Mr. Koubek reminded members of the September 12<sup>th</sup> hearing, "Poverty Amid Plenty: A Truth Commission Hearing on Long Island Poverty."
  - b. Mr. Stoltz distributed flyers for National Mental Health Awareness Week activities.
6. **Next meeting:** October 10<sup>th</sup> public hearing on the federal budget in lieu of the October 13<sup>th</sup> regular Commission meeting.