

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

Minutes of the January 12, 2018 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)
Don Friedman (Empire Justice Center)
Ellen Krakow (Nassau/Suffolk Law Services);
Christian Limbach (SC Association of Municipal Employees)
Richard Krebs, (SC Department of Labor)
Commissioner John O'Neill (SC Department of Social Services)
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); Kim Gierasch (Suffolk County Department of Health); Charles Fox (EOC-LI); Michael Haynes (LI Cares/Harry Chapin Food Bank); Greta Guarton (LI Coalition for the Homeless); Lisa Pinkard for Legislator Monica Martinez; Michael Stoltz (Association for Mental Health and Wellness); Jeffrey Reynolds (Family and Children's Association/LICADD)

Absent:

Rachel Seiler (Community Development Corporation of LI)

1. **Minutes:** Chair Richard Koubek apologized for the delay in adopting the July and September minutes. A motion to adopt the July minutes made by Christine DeLisi and seconded by Don Friedman, passed unanimously. A motion to adopt the September minutes made by Christian Limbach and seconded by Commissioner John O'Neill passed unanimously. A motion to adopt the December minutes made by Christine DeLisi and seconded by Commissioner John O'Neill passed unanimously.
2. **Election of Commission Chair and Vice Chair:** Don Friedman moved and Chris Limbach seconded a motion to elect Richard Koubek Chair and Kathy Liguori Vice Chair for a two year term. With no other nominations put forth from the floor, the motion passed unanimously. Mr. Koubek and Ms. Liguori thanked the Commission for their support and for their hard work.
3. **Supportive Housing Work Group:** Mr. Koubek stated that the Work Group will meet on January 18 and is closing in on its recommendations to be included in the report to the Legislature.
4. **Child Care Commission:** Kathy Liguori reported that the Child Care Commission summit to be on Friday, May 4th at SCCC will have a legislative focus. The title is "Providing Quality Child Care at a Time of Suburban Fiscal Crisis". County, State and federal elected officials will be invited to participate. Peggy Boyd stated that the summit should address the low wages paid to child-care teachers and other workers in the field.
5. **Commission Hearing on Poverty:** Mr. Koubek stated that this is the fifth anniversary of the Commission's Suffolk poverty report. He noted that the federal budget and tax plan

have imposed serious reductions in government programs that support poor people. He also noted that both President Donald Trump and House Speaker Paul Ryan are calling for additional changes to welfare regulations, such as their proposal to allow states to require Medicaid recipients to work. These changes, especially the tax plan, have not yet imposed such drastic changes. Don Friedman and several other Commission members pointed out that the budget cuts to programs that assist poor people are yet to come, and will be exacerbated when members of Congress begin to see the size of the deficit that the tax plan will create. This realization is likely in the near future to result in even more drastic cuts in government programs. In this context, Mr. Koubek proposed that the Commission consider a follow-up to the October budget hearing, which would focus on programs that actually move people from poverty to self-sufficiency. He stated that such a hearing would call public and legislative attention to the constraints that the Suffolk Departments of Social Services and Labor face as they implement restrictive federal guidelines, some of which impede self-sufficiency such as federal limitations on education and training as countable activities for welfare recipients. He also suggested that the hearing could profile programs that successfully transition people from poverty to self-sufficiency. A robust discussion ensued.

- a. Commissioner O'Neill expressed concern that the hearing might generate additional work for his already understaffed department since the changes to the federal programs or services have not been finalized. This could raise questions about program administration which would require staff time to prepare reports on proposed changes that may never come to fruition. Mr. Koubek stated that the hearings should not be viewed as an assessment of the quality of DSS or DOL programs so much as an assessment of the constraints in the federal regulations under which they operate. He noted that in most program categories, DSS and DOL are meeting or exceeding federal requirements.
- b. Richard Krebs pointed out that a public hearing on government programs such as education and training might backfire in that taxpayers who paid for their own education would be resentful. Mr. Krebs also stated that the hearing might call attention to the fact that New York is one of approximately 10 states that provide a Safety Net program for people who have exceeded their Public Assistance time limit, thereby generating public support for ending this costly program. Mr. Friedman noted that the hearings would yield a public conversation about the negative impacts of programs currently being considered by the administration and conservatives in Congress. Mr. Friedman also stated that quality programs do carry an initial government investment but that they save the taxpayers money in the end in that participants in these programs earn more money, are less dependent on government assistance and contribute more to the tax base. Ellen Krakow stated that the public and elected officials should see that keeping people in poverty costs the taxpayers more than investing in successful programs that move them to self-sufficiency. Mr. Koubek stated that the public and elected officials need to understand that "welfare reform" is essentially a program to reduce welfare rolls, not an anti-poverty program. Several members noted that since "welfare reform" was introduced in the 1990s, the number of people on public assistance has fallen dramatically due to work requirements and time limits. Mr. Koubek pointed out that many – perhaps most – who have left public assistance remain poor and that many transition back on to public assistance or

require government supports such as Food Stamps because they earn very low wages.

- c. Peggy Boyd stated that the Commission needs time to consider the focus and purpose of the hearing since there is very little that Suffolk government officials can actually do to override federal welfare regulations. This being the case, the Commission's hearing and report might result in frustration rather than action. Don Friedman and Ellen Krakow stated, on the other hand, that holding up successful anti-poverty programs would help Suffolk government officials, and the public, understand the long-term benefits and savings of anti-poverty programs such as case management or education and training.
 - d. Mr. Koubek asked all to consider the points made in this discussion which will be folded into the Commission's discussion of its 2018 goals at the February meeting.
6. **Announcements:** Mr. Koubek reminded the Commission of the Martin Luther King interfaith service and choir concert to be held on January 14th to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Dr. King's Poor People's Campaign. **Next meeting:** February 9th.