

**Welfare to Work Commission  
Of the Suffolk County Legislature  
Minutes of the April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013 Meeting**

**Present:** Richard Koubek, Chair; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair; SCDSS Acting Commissioner John O'Neill for John Nieves; James Andrews; Don Friedman; Ellen Krakow; Ray O'Rourke; Marcia Spector; Debbie Joseph; Kathy Malloy; Kimberly Gierasch; Rob Greenberger; Michael Stoltz

**Absent:** Marjorie Acevedo; Chavron Pierce for Legislator DuWayne Gregory; Bridget DePasquale; Gwen O'Shea; Barbara Egloff; Nina Leonhardt; Peggy Boyd; Michael Haynes; Jeff Reynolds; Gwen Branch

1. **Minutes:** Minutes of the March meeting were adopted unanimously on a motion by Marcia Spector, seconded by Don Friedman.
2. **Poverty Report:** Chair Richard Koubek reported that he, Acting Commissioner John O'Neill and Commission members Kathy Liguori, Don Friedman, Mike Stoltz and Jeff Reynolds met with the Newsday Editorial Board for one and a half hours on April 4<sup>th</sup>. This was apparently an unusually long session. The Board was very attentive to several issues in the report: child care; extended bus service and sober homes. All who attended reported on the positive feedback. Rita Ciolli who chairs the Editorial Board ended the meeting by asking the Commission to send the Board reminders about the issues contained in the report. Kathy Liguori also reported that she presented the report to the Middle Island Rotary.
3. **Sunday Bus Service:**
  - a. Richard Koubek reported on Legislator Jay Schneiderman's IR 1295-13 that would require the County to use all of the \$2 million in additional State STOA transportation funds for extended bus service rather than repurposing this funding for deficit reduction by reducing the County's transportation contribution. Mike Stoltz asked if these are recurring monies, which they are. Mr. Koubek also noted that Suffolk receives disproportionately less funding for its buses than does Nassau and that there is a growing consensus among legislators (State and County) as well as others that the State must increase its funding to Suffolk in the 2014 budget. The Commission considered a letter endorsing IR 1295-13 and, on a motion by Mike Stoltz, seconded by Ellen Krakow, the letter was approved on a vote of: 10 Yes; 2 Abstentions (Ray O'Rourke and James Andrews.) The letter is appended below.
  - b. Mr. Koubek, Ms. Liguori and Mike Stoltz will attend a press conference at 1:30 PM on April 16<sup>th</sup> in support of IR 1295-13 and then, along with Ryan Lynch of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign and Charlene Obernauer of LI Jobs with Justice, are scheduled for a formal presentation to the Legislature's Public Works and Transportation Committee at 2PM on the Commission's poverty report recommendations for extended service and IR 1295-13.
4. **Child Care:**
  - a. Kathy Liguori reported that she and Mr. Koubek were invited to speak at the press conference hosted by County Executive Steve Bellone on April 8<sup>th</sup> at which Mr. Bellone announced that he was adding additional County funding to allow 700

more children of working-poor families to receive subsidized child care. These funds were secured due to a smaller than anticipated increase in the number of mandated (TA) children receiving child care. Mr. Koubek reported that his comments at the press conference drew attention to the fact that this increase still left some 1500 children removed from the subsidized child-care rolls in 2012 due to the flawed CCBG formula. He also reported that the County Executive's office has told several Child Care Committee members that they are still in conversation with the Governor on this issue. Mr. Koubek noted that the press coverage of the County's decision to restore 700 children gave the misimpression that the child care CCBG shortfall has been resolved. Ms. Liguori stated that some of the County funds were planned to be secured by reducing the number of children's absences that SCDSS would count in their reimbursements to child-care providers but, after discussion, the number of absences was not as significantly reduced as first proposed.

- b. Ms. Liguori discussed New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) Commissioner Gladys Carrion's response to the Commission's letter sent to Governor Cuomo in February requesting a change in the methodology used for determining the SCDSS Child Care Block Grant (CCBG) allocation. Mr. Koubek shared with the Commission a draft response that was approved by the Child Care Committee which outlined these objections to the Carrion response:
  - i. The Commissioner argued that Suffolk would have lost \$1.5 million rather than \$143,716 in CCBG funds using the CCBG methodology that employed a four-year average that was used prior to 2013. The Committee did not understand what data were used to compute this amount.
  - ii. Commissioner Carrion claimed that even if the federal stimulus ARRA funds (totaling \$4.2 million applied to subsidized child care) had been computed into the CCBG methodology, Suffolk would have received only an additional \$225,000 in funding. The Committee did not understand what data were used to compute this amount.
  - iii. The Committee took exception with the Commissioner's statement that Suffolk should have seen the use of the ARRA funds as a one-time funding opportunity and thereby prepared for a "fiscal cliff" when the ARRA funds were no longer available. The committee noted that, by using the ARRA funds, Suffolk responded to the actual needs for child care, eliminating a wait list for working-poor families and increasing the number of children served by several thousand. Further, the Committee and SCDSS studied the OCFS Local Commissioner's Memoranda (LCMs) that contained instructions on how the ARRA funds could be used. There was no reference in these LCMs to the fact that use of ARRA would not be factored into the CCBG methodology and might possibly result in a CCBG funding reduction, as happened to SCDSS with a loss of over \$5 million in State funds during the past four years.
  - iv. The Committee was disturbed that Commissioner Carrion mentioned Nassau County's use of local tax revenues to support its child-care needs, thereby resulting in an increase in its CCBG allocation. The Commission

has avoided comparisons with Nassau. However, in consultation with SCDSS, it was learned that the Nassau local-tax revenue contribution to child care may have been its “salary-enhancement” program for low-wage child-care providers that was abandoned several years ago but still included in the CCBG methodology. Ms. Liguori pointed out that Suffolk has been contributing about \$400,000 a year in County tax revenues toward its Living Wage “Hardship Fund,” most of which is dedicated to low-wage child-care workers. Thus, she noted, these funds theoretically could have been calculated by OCFS into the CCBG allocation as the “salary-enhancement” funds were in Nassau.

- v. After much discussion, the Commission reached consensus that the above objections be deleted from the Commission’s response to Commissioner Carrion in the hope that, by simply focusing on the fact that the CCBG methodology does not meet the actual needs for child care in Suffolk, the response would be more directed at the goal of changing that methodology. Some Commission members noted that the stronger arguments could be used at a later date if Suffolk again loses CCBG funds in its 2013 allocation or the funding remains relatively flat. Several Commission members thought the ARRA arguments were growing stale.
  - vi. On a motion by Kathy Liguori, seconded by Ellen Krakow, the amended letter to Commissioner Carrion was adopted unanimously. The letter is appended below.
5. **Remarks by Acting DSS Commissioner John O’Neill:** Mr. Koubek and Ms. Liguori reported on a very constructive one hour meeting with Acting Commissioner John O’Neill, John Nieves and Roland Hampson that was held on March 28<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Koubek then introduced Mr. O’Neill who spoke of his background (from the banking industry to Deputy DSS Commissioner in Nassau to Deputy and now Acting DSS Commissioner in Suffolk.) He stated that he is a data driven administrator with an open-door policy that allows for input from staff as well as agencies that serve the poor. He had been invited by County Executive Bellone to take a position in Suffolk and ultimately accepted DSS because of his interest in its mission. He has been interviewed for the position of Commissioner. The decision has not yet been made as to who will serve as Commissioner.
  6. **Employment Assessment Committee:** Chair Rob Greenberger reported that the final draft of the Americans with Disabilities Act policy is almost complete. Final SCDOL comments are awaited and then the policy will be submitted to Tom Greco at SCDSS for final review. Don Friedman announced that the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance has a pilot mental-health tool. He will share it with the Commission.
  7. **Announcements:**
    - a. Long Island Jobs with Justice “Working But Still Poor” conference at Tuoro Law Center, May 3<sup>rd</sup>.
  8. **Next Meeting: Friday, May 10th , 9:30 AM** at the SCDOL One Stop Center.

## Commission Letter to The Legislature in Support of Extended Bus Service

TO: Members of the Suffolk County Legislature

### RE: IR 1295-13 2013 UTILIZING STATE FUNDS TO EXPAND BUS SERVICE IN SUFFOLK COUNTY

As you know, the Welfare to Work Commission has consistently pursued our charge to make recommendations to the Legislature on policies related to poor and near-poor people in Suffolk County. We did so most recently with our December, 2012 report, "Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County." One of these most urgent challenges is the lack of Sunday bus service and limited evening service in Suffolk County. For the past three years we have been working with Legislator Jay Schneiderman to expand Suffolk's bus service which is a lifeline for low-wage workers to get to and from their jobs.

The Commission was therefore pleased to learn that the 2013-2014 New York State Budget contains an increase in State Transit Operating Assistance ("STOA") for Suffolk Transit by approximately \$2,000,000 above the level anticipated in the Suffolk County fiscal year 2013 budget. We therefore fully support IR 1295-13 introduced by Legislator Schneiderman "that it shall be the policy of the County of Suffolk to use all increased funding provided by New York State in the 2013 State Transit Operating Assistance Allocation for Suffolk Transit to expand bus services in Suffolk County in the evening and on Sundays." *This additional State funding should not result in a \$2 million dollar reduction in the County's contribution to Suffolk Transit Public Bus System for purposes of deficit-reduction.*

Summer Sunday service on the East End has been an enormous success, with a ridership of 8,674 people occurring despite the fare increase used to support this expanded service. We believe that an expansion of service County-wide will have similar results particularly if the lines designated for expanded service serve low-income communities and are linked to commercial centers. The Commission has already identified some of these lines and believes that the Department of Public Works could develop a viable plan as called for in IR 1295-13.

The need for Sunday service and for extended evening service has repeatedly been demonstrated. The 2008 Abrams-Cherwoni study, "Comprehensive Bus Route Analysis and Service Development Transit Plan for the Suffolk County Department Public Bus System" addressed this need, as did the Budget Review Office's "Review of the 2013 Operating Budget." For these reasons, the Commission's 2012 "Struggling in Suburbia" report called for "County-wide Sunday service" and "evening hours (to 10PM) on the 24 routes recommended by the Abrams-Cherwoni study."

Past efforts to achieve extended service have been frustrated by the County's fiscal constraints. Understanding these constraints, the Commission sees the additional STOA funds as an opportunity, not to be lost, to finally establish some Sunday and perhaps some extended evening bus service. We believe that this extended service will provide short-term and long-term benefits to Suffolk, including increased sales tax revenue as more riders utilize Sunday service to shop and more low-wage workers are hired and are able to reach their jobs, thereby also generating additional revenues for the County.

But, in the end, the Commission believes that utilizing these additional STOA funds is a moral imperative for the County, helping to relieve in one specific way, the on-going insecurities, uncertainties and indignities faced daily by Suffolk's working-poor people. As the Commission delved into the plight of

low-income Suffolk residents, we heard numerous stories of how important extended bus service is to low-wage workers. None impressed us more than the story of a house cleaner relayed to us by Deborah Kirnon, Director of the St. Anne Parish Outreach Center in Brentwood. Ms. Kirnon told us that this woman had a job on Fire Island. Each Sunday, because there was no bus service, she walked from her home in Brentwood to the Fire Island ferry in Bay Shore – a distance of about five miles one way. She was fired because sometimes she missed the ferry.

There are thousands of similar stories in Suffolk: other essential low-wage workers such as home health aides or store clerks who work on Sundays, work after 8PM which is the current cutoff for evening bus service, and who must therefore either pay expensive taxi fares, rely on others for car service ...or walk to and from work. One taxi fare could eat up most or all of a day's wages for one of these workers. This is a situation that does not serve them or the larger Suffolk economy.

Fortunately, the additional STOA funds can remedy this situation which is why the Commission endorses IR 1295-13.

Yours truly for the Commission

*Richard Koubek*

Richard Koubek, PhD, Chair

*Kathy Liguori*

Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair

### **Commission response to OCFS Commissioner Gladys Carrion**

Ms. Gladys Carrion, Esq.  
Commissioner  
New York State Office of Children and Family Services  
Capital View Office Park  
52 Washington Street  
Rensselaer, New York 12144-2834

Dear Commissioner Carrion:

Thank you for your prompt reply to the Welfare to Work Commission's February 12<sup>th</sup> letter to Governor Cuomo regarding child-care funding. While your letter again provides your Department's rationale for the current CCBG funding methodology, we remain unconvinced that this methodology, the OCFS rationale for it, and your assessment of Suffolk's CCBG allocations in the March 14<sup>th</sup> letter address the actual child-care needs of Suffolk County.

We are pleased that our Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone announced on April 8<sup>th</sup> that he was able to expand eligibility for subsidized child care from 100% to 125% of FPL, adding 700 children to the rolls. While helpful, this does not solve the underlying problem of an inconsistent CCBG methodology which is preventing Suffolk from returning the eligibility to where it belongs and where it was in 2011–200% of FPL.

We again restate our position that *the current CCBG methodology fails to address the actual child care needs of Suffolk County* and, in fact, rewards districts for decisions made four years ago, some of which have nothing to do with directly meeting the actual demand for child care in their counties. As we have demonstrated previously, *the demand for child care in Suffolk increased since 2009 from 3,627 to 5,900 children –an increase of almost 63% - served while Suffolk’s CCBG allocation has decreased by \$3.5 million.* This is counterintuitive.

We therefore respectfully request that you consider the Suffolk DSS proposal that the CCBG methodology substitute its heavy reliance on the four year average of claims submitted for a more multi-faced approach that utilizes a more realistic two-year average and includes such factors as:

1. Funding for mandated services (Suffolk’s TA child-care population, for example, has increased 142% from 2007 to 2012 and increased almost 82% from 2009 to 2012, which significantly reduced the CCBG funds available for NTA, working-poor families),
2. The various child care modalities,
3. Regional costs of care;
4. The district size.

Absent a change in the CCBG methodology, we remain concerned that the 2013-2014 CCBG allocation will once again fail to meet the actual child care needs for Suffolk County.

Commissioner Carrion, we thank you for your consideration to the children and families of Suffolk County and for your committed leadership to the children in New York State as well.

Yours truly for the Commission,

*Richard Koubek*

Richard Koubek, PhD, Chair

*Kathy Liguori*

Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair

CC: Members of the Suffolk County Legislature  
Acting SCDSS Commissioner John O’Neill  
Roland Hampson, Director, Suffolk County Child Care Division