

**Welfare to Work Commission
Of the Suffolk County Legislature
Minutes of the June 8, 2012 Meeting**

Present: Richard Koubek, Chair; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair; Rushka Tcholakova; Marcia Spector; Peggy Boyd; Michael Stoltz; Bridget DePasquale; Ellen Krakow; Roland Hampson; Debbie Joseph; Barbara Stoothoff for Eric Lopez;

Excused: Gwen Branch; Don Friedman; Frank Casiglia; Jeff Reynolds; Rob Greenberger; Barbara Egloff; Jeff Reynolds; Pam Killoran; Marjorie Acevedo; Kimberly Gierasch; Michael Haynes

Guest: Kimberly Staab, SCDOL Client Benefits administrator

1. **Minutes:** Minutes of the April 13th meeting were adopted unanimously on a motion by Marcia Spector, seconded by Kathy Liguori. Chair Richard Koubek noted that the May Commission meeting had been cancelled due to the heavy public hearings schedule.
2. **Child Care Funding:** Kimberly Staab reported that the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) has announced its Child Care Block Grant (CCBG) allocations for 2012-2013. Suffolk County is losing \$143,716; Nassau County is receiving an increase of \$2,647,218.
 - a. Mr. Koubek reminded the Commission that at the April meeting it had adopted a report and letter to all Suffolk County legislators, Suffolk State assembly and senate members, the County Executive and Governor Cuomo pointing out that the CCBG funding, 2008-2011 has improperly penalized Suffolk County and asking for a restoration of funding that had been decreased.
 - b. Kathy Liguori explained that the CCBG guidelines had permitted counties to use federal American Relief and Recovery act (ARRA) stimulus funds for child care. When Suffolk did so, OCFS penalized the County for what they considered a failure by Suffolk to fully utilize its CCBG funds.
 - c. Kim Staab reiterated that SCDSS properly used all ARRA and CCBG funds and that it fully met the County's demand for child-care services. With the CCBG reductions and the increased demand for subsidized child care, SCDSS has been forced to reduce the eligibility requirement for subsidized child care that supports working poor families from 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) to 150% and that, with the new CCBG cuts, they may have to reduce eligibility to 125% of FPL. Ms. Staab also noted that SCDSS may be forced to halt all new requests for non TANF subsidized child care as early as the June of 2012 and that SCDSS anticipates a shortfall of \$4 million CCBG dollars in September 2012. Kathy Liguori, Mike Stoltz and other Commission members noted that this would be devastating to working poor families and might force some out of the workforce and onto Public Assistance at a much greater cost to the County than the child-care subsidies. Ms. Liguori also raised concern about the affordability of the 30% child care parent fees for families earning 150% - 125% FPL especially when Food Stamp eligibility is at 200% FPL.

- d. Believing that the SCDSS allocation is misguided and based on improper, possibly illegal, interpretations of the use of CCBG funds, in particular, the SCDSS application of ARRA funds to subsidized child care for which SCDSS was penalized, the Commission carefully weighed an action plan and reached consensus on the following steps to secure restoration of appropriate CCBG funding for Suffolk:
 - i. Commissioner Blass - possibly with County Executive Steve Bellone - will be asked to write a letter to the Commissioner of OCFS protesting the CCBG reduction and explaining the reasons why the formula used to arrive at the CCBG allocation improperly penalized the County for using ARRA funds to support subsidized child care.
 - ii. The Commission will ask for a joint meeting with senior State legislators, Senator Owen Johnson and Assemblyman Robert Sweeney, to ask for their assistance in restoring the CCBG funds.
 - iii. The Commission will ask the Presiding Officer to facilitate a meeting with Suffolk County attorney Denis Cohen to discuss a FOIL of information on how OCFS arrived at the Suffolk CCBG allocation for the purpose of possibly filing either an Article 78 and/ or a class action suit on behalf of families that have lost subsidized child care. The law suit(s) would be premised on the fact that while OCFS regulations clearly permitted counties to apply ARRA funds to subsidized child care, Suffolk was subsequently penalized with a reduction in CCBG funds for having done so.
 - iv. Once data and arguments are crystallized, the Commission will call a press conference, with SCDSS, State legislators and Congressmen Israel, King and Bishop, to denounce the penalization of SCDSS for having properly and legally used ARRA funds for subsidized child care.
3. **ADA Flyer and Policy:** Barbara Stoothoff reported that SCDOL had requested an opinion from the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) regarding some of the Department's concerns about the draft SCDSS Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) "Did You Know?" flyer and the ADA policy. She reported that OTDA informed her Department that any decisions on these matters are to be made by the Suffolk County attorney's office. She therefore stated that SCDSS should proceed with both the ADA flyer and policy.
4. **Out of State Safety Net Clients.** Ellen Krakow reported on an email exchange she and Don Friedman had regarding out-of-state Safety Net recipients. Both she and Mr. Friedman agreed that federal law and court decisions prohibit counties, under the 14th Amendment's equal protection clause, from discriminating against out-of-state residents who seek Public Assistance after having moved to Suffolk County. Mr. Koubek stated that he would share these opinions with Legislator Kate Browning.
5. **Sunday Bus Service:** Mr. Koubek reported that he met with Legislator Jay Schneiderman regarding Sunday bus service. The new State funds that Legislator Schneiderman hoped would fund County-wide Sunday service are being used to close the existing Suffolk bus deficit and a deficit in SCAT service for disabled people. Legislator Schneiderman agreed to set up a meeting to discuss other funding options with the Suffolk County Department of Public Works, the legislative Budget Review Office, Mr. Koubek for the Commission and

bus-service advocates Charlene Obernauer (LI Jobs with Justice) and Ryan Lynch (Tri State Transportation Campaign.)

6. **Commission Hearings on Suburban Poverty:** Mr. Koubek reported that the audio transcripts for each hearing are already posted on the Commission's page of the Legislature's website. He stated that 42 people testified during the almost 15 hours of hearings. There was general consensus from Commission members that the hearings were very valuable, and that the testimony from academic experts, leaders of government agencies and nonprofit organizations contained a wealth of information. Mr. Koubek pointed out that the Commission had hoped for media coverage of the hearings to bring public attention to the problem of poverty when the decision was made to hold them last fall. He stated that the media coverage was excellent: two *Newsday* stories, a *Newsday* editorial, two *News 12* stories and a possible *New York Times* editorial.
 - a. There was disappointment at the failure of any elected government officials to testify other than Legislator DuWayne Gregory, whose attendance at and participation in the hearings was very much appreciated by Commission members.
 - b. There was also some disappointment that more struggling individuals and families did not testify. There was consensus that public testimony may be very difficult for people who are struggling to make ends met. It was therefore agreed that the Commission would host a series of focus groups over the summer at which working poor people could tell their stories in settings that are more intimate. Commission members from nonprofit agencies would be asked to host these hearings for their clients. Additionally, Bridget DePasquale stated that Catholic Charities might convene a focus group of parish outreach coordinators.
 - c. Peggy Boyd noted that the Commission would need to dig deeply into specific policy recommendations for its report to the Legislature and she felt that many of those who testified did not offer specific recommendations. Mr. Koubek stated that establishing such recommendations would be a major task of the Commission as the report is developed.
 - d. There was an extensive discussion of the roles of public and private agencies in addressing the needs of poor people. Don Friedman sent an email, which Mr. Koubek read, stating that nonprofits should not be seen as an alternative to government supports for the poor. A number of Commission members discussed the importance of public-private partnerships, as well as the need for some nonprofits to professionalize and consolidate their services. Mr. Koubek stated that government revenue issues must be addressed in the report since government programs for the poor are suffering cuts at all levels in order to balance budgets.
 - e. Mike Stoltz spoke about the importance of including mental health issues and services into the report since many people are poor due to mental health disabilities that prevent them from leading lives of self sufficiency. In addition, he noted, the stresses of poverty contribute to mental health problems among poor people.
 - f. Rushka Tcholakova noted a gap in the testimony in that no one spoke about "banking deserts" in which poor communities are often without essential banking services or are denied such services including mortgages and mortgage refinancing.

7. Announcements:

- a.** Roland Hampson stated the serious concerns that SCDSS has regarding the layoff of SCDSS security guards and the privatization of these services. He noted that the security guards are an integral part of SCDSS services and that they often get to know clients and serve as informal screeners as the people wait for their interviews.
 - b.** Mr. Koubek announced that on June 20th, 7:00 PM, the Huntington Cinema Arts Centre would be offering a screening of “Hard Times: Lost on Long Island,” the HBO documentary that features three of the people who testified at the opening hearing (Ele Ruth Melendez, Coordinator of the St. Frances de Chantal Outreach Center in Wantagh and Mr. and Mrs. Puccio, her clients who were middle class but slipped into poverty during the Great Recession.)
- 8. Next Meeting:** Friday, July 13, 9:30 AM, SCDOL One Stop Center.