

**Welfare to Work Commission
Of the Suffolk County Legislature
Minutes of the August 10th, 2012 Meeting**

Present: Richard Koubek, Chair; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair; Leg. DuWayne Gregory; Jason Richberg; Ray O'Rourke; Marcia Spector; Peggy Boyd; Michael Stoltz; Jeff Reynolds; Barbara Egloff; Roland Hampson; Marjorie Acevedo; Rob Greenberger; Lori Andrade

Excused: Bridget DePasquale; Gwen Branch; Don Friedman; Frank Casiglia; Ellen Krakow; Kimberly Gierasch; Debbie Joseph; Michael Haynes; James Andrews

Guest: Brian Lahiff, Child Care Council of Suffolk

1. **Minutes:** Minutes of the June 8th meeting were adopted unanimously as amended on a motion by Kathy Liguori, seconded by Marjorie Acevedo. Chair Richard Koubek reminded the Commission that the July meeting was cancelled due to the scheduling of poverty focus groups and child-care funding meetings with legislators.
2. **Child-Care Funding:** The Commission entered into an extensive discussion of the child-care crisis facing SCDSS due to funding reductions imposed by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS).
 - a. Richard Koubek reported that Commissioner Greg Blass and his staff had a conference call with OCFS staff in early July that yielded little regarding the funding reductions. Commissioner Blass and his staff felt that OCFS believes that SCDSS simply did not do well in the current funding round.
 - b. Mr. Koubek and Kathy Liguori reported on a July 24th meeting with State Senator Owen Johnson and his aide, Gordon Canary, that was also attended by Commissioner Blass and Kim Staab of SCDSS, Deputy County Executive Luis Montez, Janet Walerstein and Brian Lahiff of the Child Care Council of Suffolk and Charlene Obernauer of LI Jobs with Justice. The meeting delegation asked Senator Johnson to reach out to Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos asking him to urge Governor Andrew Cuomo to intervene with an emergency restoration of funds for SCDSS. Senator Johnson's aide, Gordon Canary, offered to reach out to Senator Skelos. Senator Johnson repeatedly reminded the delegation that the State is short on funds, and he suggested private fundraising to help restore the lost OCFS funds.
 - c. Mr. Koubek reported that Senator Flanagan, as chair of the Senate's Education Committee, could play a key role in the negotiations to restore funding. A meeting with Senator Flanagan was scheduled.
 - d. Kathy Liguori and Brian Lahiff reported that a delegation of early-childhood educators had previously planned meetings with each state senator over the summer to discuss a public-policy agenda for early childhood education. The OCFS cuts to Suffolk would be added to this agenda.
 - e. Ms. Liguori and Mr. Koubek reported on a meeting with Suffolk County legislative Minority Leader John Kennedy which was held on July 30th. Legislator Kennedy was supportive of the restoration, agreed to contact Senator Skelos and to consider supporting a letter to Governor Cuomo from the Legislature. He also

suggested that advocacy for the funding restoration specify the negative impacts that these cuts are having on the Long Island economy and business community.

- f. The Commission next considered three draft letters to Governor Cuomo asking his intervention to provide emergency child-care funding for SCDSS: a State Senate letter; a State Assembly letter; a Suffolk County Legislature letter. It was noted that Erie County has received such an emergency appropriation. There was consensus that, where possible, each letter should have the same policy requests while using its own language to support these policy positions. It was also agreed that the Commission would focus on the Suffolk County Legislature's letter. After edits to a draft, a motion was made by Michael Stoltz, seconded by Kathy Liguori, to ask the Suffolk County Legislature to send the letter appended below. The motion passed unanimously. The letter would be submitted to the Democratic and Republican legislative caucuses for action.
 - g. The Commission discussed the possibility of a press conference in late September that would be attended by federal, state and county government officials as well as parents and children affected by the funding cuts. This action would be taken in efforts by County Executive Steve Bellone as well as the state and county legislative efforts to get Governor Cuomo's intervention all failed to achieve the restoration.
 - h. Roland Hampson reported that the Empire Justice Center's lawsuit was upheld by the court thereby requiring SCDSS to temporarily reinstate the approximately 1,200 children who lost their child care due to the funding cuts. The lawsuit was premised on alleged technical errors in the letters of notification. He noted that new letters notifying these parents that they would lose their child care would be sent in a few days. There was some concern by Commission members that temporarily reinstating these children might deplete the existing child-care funds. Mr. Koubek stated that the Commission was unaware of this lawsuit until the day that the court rendered its decision.
3. **Commission Focus Groups on Suburban Poverty:** Several focus groups are being planned, including a youth group arranged by EOC, possible parish outreach clients and staff arranged by Catholic Charities, mental health clients arranged by Mike Stoltz and immigrants arranged by the Empire Justice Center.
 4. **Employment Assessment Committee:** Chair Rob Greenberger reported that the Committee is working toward finalizing a draft policy and procedure manual for Suffolk County DSS designed to ensure its compliance with components of the Americans with Disabilities Act leading to fewer public assistance recipients being sanctioned. The Committee is now focusing on assessment tools. They will meet again in September.
 5. **Sober Homes Update:** Jeff Reynolds, who co-chairs the Suffolk County Sober Homes Oversight Board, provided an update on sober-homes policies. He reported that the Board is now using "Recovery Home" as the term-of-art rather than "Sober Home." He stated that the SCDSS Recovery Homes RFQ has been revamped to be more flexible and inclusive than the original RFQ and that it would be re-issued shortly. Rates for qualified residences will increase from \$309 to \$475 a month for room and from \$500 to \$659 for room and board. The program will be capped at 45 individuals in year one. Mr. Reynolds will send a copy of the revised RFQ to Mr. Koubek who will share it with the Commission. Mr. Koubek reported on a conversation that he had with News 12 editorial commentator Peter Kohler regarding the

Town of Brookhaven's decision to close a notorious "sober home." Both Mr. Koubek and Mr. Reynolds agreed that closing such homes is preferable to allowing them to continue to undermine the recovery of their residents.

6. **Next Meeting:** Friday, September 14, 9:30 AM, SCDOL One Stop Center.

Suffolk Legislature's Draft Child-Care Letter

August, 2012

Hon. Andrew Cuomo
Governor of the State of New York
Executive Chamber, The State Capitol
Albany, New York 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo,

The Suffolk County Legislature urges your support for restoring New York State Office of Children and Families Services Child Care Block Grant (OCFS/CCBG) funds to Suffolk County which have been cut by \$3.5 million over the past three years. These CCBG reductions have taken place while the Suffolk County Department of Social Services (SCDSS) increased the number of children served from 3,627 in 2009 to more than 5,900 in 2011. CCBG funds serve the most vulnerable working-poor families who rely on child-care subsidies to remain in the workplace. Many of these low-wage workers are an integral part of the important service sector of Long Island's economy.

As a result of the CCBG reductions – the latest being a \$143,000 CCBG cut announced in June of 2012 – **SCDSS has been forced to devastate many working-poor families who rely on the CCBG subsidy by:**

- **Increasing the amount of the child-care costs parents must contribute** from 15% to 30%;
- **Decreasing the child-care subsidy eligibility level for working-poor families** from 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) or \$46,100 for a family of four **to 100% of the FPL which is \$23,050 for a family of four;**
- **Eliminating subsidized child care for 2,254 children** of working-poor families since January, 2012;
- **Closing the subsidized child-care program** to any new working-poor families.

Testifying at the Legislature's Welfare to Work Commission spring, 2012 public hearings, "Struggling on Long Island: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County," a number of working-poor parents stated that, due to the loss of their subsidized child care, they would be forced to reduce their work hours in order to qualify for the subsidy or quit their jobs altogether or go on Public Assistance or place their children in unlicensed and possibly dangerous child-care settings. Additionally, child-care providers have laid off employees as a result of the loss of CCBG-subsidized children and some have been forced out of business. Every dollar spent on

child care adds \$2 to the local economy; each dollar removed from child care expenditures removes \$2 dollars from Suffolk's economy.

The Suffolk Legislature believes that the State's OCFS/CCBG reductions since 2009 are penalizing working-poor families while undermining the fragile economic recovery underway in Suffolk. The Legislature further believes that these CCBG cuts make no sense because:

1. Nassau County with comparable child-care needs received a \$2.6 million increase in its 2012 CCBG allocation at the same time that Suffolk County sustained a \$143,000 reduction;
2. **OCFS based the CCBG reductions on an allocations formula that penalized SCDSS for using federal stimulus ARRA funds to increase Suffolk's subsidized child-care rolls, despite being authorized to do so in Local Commissioners Memoranda 09-OCFS-LCM-14 and 10-OCFS-LCM-14, issued in 2009 and again in 2010.** The outdated OCFS formula applies a four year average of OCFS/CCBG fund usage by a county to determine its current CCBG allocation. It thereby did not take into account the use of ARRA funds which OCFS authorized.

Historically, the OCFS/CCBG grant has not been sufficient to meet the *actual* demand for subsidized child care in Suffolk. For this reason, SCDSS properly used its OCFS allocated ARRA funds to supplement its CCBG funding and thereby meet the actual demand for child care services. Consequently in 2011 there was no wait list for subsidized child care in Suffolk County. Yet, the price paid for the authorized decision to use ARRA funds to meet Suffolk's actual demand for child care has been a \$3.5 million reduction in OCFS/CCBG funds since 2009.

Therefore, the Suffolk County Legislature calls upon you to intervene with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services to:

1. Restore, through emergency funding, \$3.9 million in the CCBG allocation for 2012-2013 to Suffolk County which will allow the Department to reinstitute the 125% Federal Poverty Level (FPL). This additional funding will restore CCBG subsidies to hundreds of children throughout Suffolk. We believe there is precedent for this as Erie County was provided with emergency funding when faced with a similar situation.
2. Provide Suffolk County with a permanent recurring increase of \$3.9 million in CCBG funding order to maintain the 125% Federal Poverty Level (FPL).
3. Urge OCFS to revise its CCBG funding formula that merely considers the four year average of CCBG claims. Suffolk County proposes an allocation formula which includes funding for mandated services (Temporary Assistance caseload, 100% of the FPL as well as all Child Care Guarantees cases) in conjunction with such factors as child care modalities, regional costs of care and district size. We believe that this multifaceted funding methodology would be equitable for all counties.