

**Welfare to Wok Commission
Of the Suffolk County Legislature
Minutes of the September 9, 2011 Meeting**

Present: Richard Koubek, Chair; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair; Paula Fries for Michael Stoltz; Rob Greenberger; Barbara Egloff; Roger Podd for Pam Killoran; Eric Lopez; Debbie Joseph; Don Friedman; Linda O'Donohoe for Roland Hampson; Nina Leonhardt; Timothy Rothang for Leg. Kate Browning; Michael Haynes; Frank Casiglia; Ellen Krakow; Gwen Branch;

Excused: Peggy Boyd; Jack Caffey; Jeff Reynolds; Bridget DePasquale; Frederick Combs for Joan Grant;

Guest: Mary Finnin, AN, MS,

1. **Minutes:** Minutes of the July 8th meeting were adopted unanimously on a motion by Kathy Liguori, seconded by Don Friedman, following a correction to the Child Care section.
2. **Presentation by Mary Finnin on the Privatization of County Health Services:** Chair Richard Koubek reported on testimony that he heard at the County's Health Center Commission as well as at legislative hearings at which Mary Finnin, a public health-care advocate and member of the County Health Center Advisory Committee, had stated her concerns about the privatization of County health programs. Thinking this would be a good topic for the Commission to learn about, he and Vice Chair Kathy Liguori, invited Ms. Finnin to make the following presentation.
 - a. Ms. Finnin began by noting that all but two of the County health centers have already been quasi-privatized in that they are County centers which are administered by private institutions such as the Stony Brook medical center of North Shore/LIJ hospital. She stated that workers at the contracted health centers are generally unionized, as are the workers at the County administered centers, but that they earn on average \$20,000 more than the County workers do. She believes that the County goal has been to remove as many workers as possible from the County payroll.
 - b. Ms. Finnin stated that there are inconsistencies in the provision of services at the contracted centers. She noted that this is a cause for concern since public health institutions such as the County health centers or the County's John J. Foley Skilled Nursing facility provide essential services to poor and vulnerable residents who are often neglected or rejected by private health-care facilities. These public facilities were designed to provide access to health care for residents who are uninsured or who otherwise cannot pay for their own care. She expressed concern about other County decisions to privatize or eliminate public-health services such as: closing the BOCES clinic; privatizing the Division of Public Health Nurses Home Health Program and privatizing the County jail's medical unit.

- c. Ms. Finnin expressed disappointment that the County does not have clear health-care priorities nor does it have a comprehensive public-health care plan. She argued for a County tax increase dedicated to health services.
 - d. Ms. Finnin pointed out that this year alone, the County health centers have faced significant cuts in State funding, first with the 5% reduction in Governor Cuomo's 2011 budget, then by another 8.6% in the State clawback of funds. She expressed concern that additional cuts might be in County Executive Steve Levy's 2012 proposed budget that was due for release in a few days.
 - e. [**Note:** Following the September 9th Commission meeting, the County Executive's budget was released with significant reductions in County funding for the health centers and zero funding for J.J Foley Skilled Nursing Facility and the Public Health Nursing Home Care Program. On September 23rd, Richard Koubek submitted the following motion electronically, which was seconded by Kathy Liguori: "The Welfare to Work Commission should draft a letter to each member of the Suffolk County Legislature opposing the funding reductions to Suffolk County health centers contained in the County Executive's proposed 2012 budget." The motion passed: Yes – 12; NO – 0; Abstentions – 2 (Pam Kiloran; Roland Hampson.) A draft letter (attached below) was submitted for approval, on a motion by Kathy Liguori, seconded by Mike Stoltz. The motion to accept the letter without any changes, passed on September 30th: Yes - 15; No – 0; Abstentions – 3 (Frank Casiglia; Eric Lopez, Roland Hampson.) The letter was distributed to each member of the Legislature on October 3rd and presented at the Legislature's Budget Committee Public Hearing on October 4th by Richard Koubek.]
 - f. Ms. Finnin reported that the County's application for the County health centers to become Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) had been turned down by the US Department of Health and Human Services. This was a major disappointment since the County health centers are in certain ways a national model for community based delivery of health services and the FQHC status would have provided a much-needed federal funding stream. She said that the County was now submitting an application for a FQHC "Look-Alike" grant which would provide less federal funding than full FQHC status. A number of Commission members expressed surprise and disappointment and concern about why Suffolk County's FQHC application was denied. Chair Richard Koubek said that he would contact SC Department of Health Commissioner James Tomarkin to discuss the FQHC issue.
3. **Safety Net Program:** Richard Koubek discussed reports that County Executive Steve Levy was asking New York State to withdraw from the TANF Safety Net program, in part because New York is one of only 10 states that provide Safety net services for people who have reached their federal five-year public assistance limit or for single adults or childless couples. Part of Mr. Levy's motivation is rooted in the State now asking the County to cover 71% (rather than 50%) of the Safety Net costs. There was Commission consensus that, while most disagreed with both the State's decision to raise the County's Safety Net costs as well as the County Executive's decision to ask the State to end the Safety Net program, no action was necessary by the Commission since eliminating the Safety Net is a State decision not likely to be implemented.

4. **Sunday Bus Service:** Richard Koubek reported his conversation with County Legislator Jay Schneiderman about Sunday bus service. Legislator Schneiderman confirmed *Newsday* reports that the east-end summer pilot for Sunday service was a great success, with more passengers and revenues than anticipated. He is still awaiting a Department of Public Works report on County-wide Sunday service. He plans to move his resolution for full County Sunday service in late autumn 2011 or early winter 2012.
5. **Child Care Committee:** Chair Kathy Liguori reported that the PCAN – Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect -- training proposal was revised, as per the July Commission meeting, to provide County-wide trainings (rather than targeted trainings in legislative districts with high numbers of CPS reports.) She and Richard Koubek subsequently met with Presiding Officer Bill Lindsay and with the LI representative of the NYS Office of Family and Children’s Services, each of whom was open to trying to find \$33,000 to fund the program. SCDSS Commissioner Greg Blass also stated to the Legislature’s Health and Human Services Committee on August 11th, when the Commission’s CPS training was formally presented by Mr. Koubek and Ms. Liguori, that SCDSS would try to find \$33,000 to fund the program as well. Mr. Koubek reported that, despite these favorable responses, the current tight State and County budgets might preclude funding for the CPS/PCAN training.
6. **Employment Assessment Committee:**
 - a. Chair Rob Greenberger reported that the disabilities “Did You Know?” brochure has been delayed on the issue of whether SCDSS needs to provide disabled clients with meeting reminders as well as with extended time to complete and submit required forms. Ellen Krakow pointed out that very few people may have the kinds of disabilities that require reminders (e.g., people with serious Attention Deficit Disorder) and that they could be identified in advance for special reminders, rather than having all clients receive reminders. The brochure states that this service “may” be provided, as opposed to “must” be provided. Linda O’Donohoe stated that SCDSS already sends computer-generated reminders in the mail.
 - b. Mr. Greenberger also reported that discussions on creating a SCDSS Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) policy have been very fruitful. Working from another New York State county policy that Ms. Krakow and Don Friedman consider to be a very effective model, SCDSS is drafting a similar policy and the draft has been submitted to the Committee for extensive discussion and analysis. The Committee will meet again in early fall to continue these discussions.
7. **Sober Homes Oversight Board:** Richard Koubek reported on a July press conference to announce the creation of the Sober Homes Oversight Board that was attended by both the Commissioners of SCDSS and SCDOH. Legislator Browning hosted the press conference. The legislatively-assigned members of the Board will soon be invited to participate.
8. **SCDOL Health-Training Grant:** Roger Podd reported on the SCDOL \$5 million federal health services training grant which generally met or exceeded its goals to enroll people in training programs as well as the number completing the trainings and receiving credentials. For example, there were 223 “Vocational Training Starts”

(compared with a goal of 172); 145 “Completed Trainings” (compared with the goal of 129) and 145 “Number Receiving a Credential” (compared with a goal of 84.) However, the poor economy prevented many of these people from being placed in or retaining employment (14 compared with the goal of 145.)

9. **Next Meeting:** Friday, October 21st, 9:30 AM, SCDOL One Stop Center.

Commission Letter to the Legislature On Suffolk County health Center County Budget Cuts

September 30, 2011

TO: Members of the Suffolk County Legislature

The Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature this year made funding for the Suffolk County health centers a Commission priority because we believe that these centers are a lifeline for working poor people who do not have health insurance. And, the health centers save the County millions of dollars in expensive Emergency Room care since a typical ER visit can cost about \$900 compared with a health center visit of about \$250.

We applauded the State \$10 million reduction in their proposed \$19.5 million clawback to the health centers, arrived at in August, and we agreed with County Executive Steve Levy when he said this to *Newsday* about the clawback agreement, “There is still pain, but we avoided Armageddon.” We are therefore, shocked that, less than a month later, the County Executive has proposed a \$10.6 million County reduction in 2012 County funding for the health centers (21%), compared with the 2011 budget, which comes on top of the 5% 2011 State reduction and the 8% clawback reduction in funding already imposed on the centers.

At the May 2011 Commission meeting, Craig Freas of the BRO told us that any reduction in health-center funding that exceeds 10% is “untenable.” Yet, the County Executive’s budget calls for the elimination of all funding for the Dolan Center, a 53% reduction for the Coram Center and an average reduction of 12% for the remaining centers.

The Commission is aware of the dire fiscal constraints facing the County. Nevertheless, this must not be a time when the basic health needs of our poorest and most vulnerable neighbors are sacrificed to close a budget deficit. Public-health services are essential to the health and productivity of working-poor families. Also, their health could affect the health of many Long Islanders. Children and workers without health insurance, and proper treatment in a health center, can wreak havoc during flu season, to cite but one example.

Given the structure of health care in the U.S., public-health services typically require government subsidies. While privatization of such services seems to be a “quick fix,” in reality privatized health services rarely meet the needs of the most vulnerable to the same extent that subsidized public-health services do. For this reason, the Commission is urging that you reject the proposed 2012 County reductions in funding for the health centers.

Yours truly for the Commission,

Richard Koubek

Richard Koubek, PhD. Chair

Kathy Liguori

Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair