

**Welfare to Work Commission  
Of the Suffolk County Legislature  
Minutes of the October 21, 2011 Meeting**

**Present:** Richard Koubek, Chair; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair; Michael Stoltz; Barbara Egloff; Peggy Boyd; Pam Killoran; Eric Lopez; Debbie Joseph; Don Friedman; Roland Hampson; Jeff Reynolds; Bridget DePasquale; Frederick Combs for Joan Grant; Michael Haynes; Ellen Krakow

**Excused:** Rob Greenberger; Nina Leonhardt; Jack Caffey; Frank Casiglia; Gwen Branch

1. **Minutes:** Minutes of the September 9th meeting were adopted unanimously on a motion by Don Friedman seconded by Peggy Boyd.,
2. **Suffolk County 2012 Recommend Budget:**
  - a. **HHS Budget Hearing:** Chair Richard Koubek reported on the October 17<sup>th</sup> Health and Human Services Committee Budget hearing he attended which he described as extraordinary. He noted that both the SCDSS and SCDOH Commissioners spoke explicitly about the damage that the County Executive's Recommended 2012 Budget will do to their departments. The staff cuts at both departments exceeded 500 positions. Mr. Koubek told the HHS Committee in his testimony that, as a taxpayer, he saw the 2012 Recommended Budget to be the systematic destabilization of County government. Peggy Boyd and Jeff Reynolds each attended the HHS hearing as well and noted the graphic and disturbing testimony presented by the Commissioners and their staffs. While there was gratitude for the Commissioners' frank assessments of the budget, a number of Commission members noted that historically Commissioners do not criticize the Recommended Budget and that the staff reductions proposed in the 2012 Recommended Budget were the result of years of staffing cuts. Mr. Koubek noted that the general fund property tax has not been increased for eight years. Accounting for inflation, this would mean at least a 16-20% reduction in funding for County programs.
  - b. **Health Centers:** Richard Koubek also attended the October 4<sup>th</sup> Budget Committee hearing where, in his testimony, he expressed the Commission's concerns about the proposed cuts in funding for the Suffolk health centers which had been transmitted to the Legislature in a September 30<sup>th</sup> letter. He reported that Budget Committee Chair DuWayne Gregory acknowledged the letter and that both Democratic and Republican members of the Committee were supportive of maintaining funding for the health centers and that they too expressed concern about the proposed funding reductions.
    - i. Mr. Koubek reported that SCDOH Commissioner James Tomarken explained that the County's health centers did not receive Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) status because the federal government cut the number of awards in half and made centers that serve migrant and homeless people their priority. The County is

resubmitting for a FQHC Look Alike status, which may take over a year.

- c. **SCDSS Proposed Staffing Reductions:** Roland Hampson provided details on the increase in SCDSS services over the past two years, which ranged from a 39% increase in Medicaid to a 109% increase in Food Stamps (SNAP.)
    - i. He stated that the proposed staffing reductions would devastate the Department's ability to deliver services. One possible move will be to close the Smithtown Center to the public and reconfigure the Southwest, Coram and Riverhead catchment areas.
    - ii. Mr. Hampson pointed out that the SCDSS staff vacancy rate had risen to 14.5%, significantly higher than the 8% rate reported earlier in the year. Mr. Koubek noted that this 14.5% staff vacancy rate was higher than the 11% rate, which the Commission had protested several years ago in a report and in testimony to the Legislature. Mr. Hampson pointed out that SCDSS only uses filled positions to gauge operational effectiveness and it is the filled positions where SCDSS is seeing a proposed reduction in staffing.
    - iii. Mr. Koubek further pointed out that a number of the proposed staff eliminations are for positions that are basically 100% funded by the federal and/or State governments, such as Medicaid. Mr. Hampson stated that there are County costs attached to each of these positions which the County Executive factored as savings into his Recommended Budget by eliminating these positions
  - d. **Commission Letter to the Legislature:** There ensued an extensive discussion of a letter that the Commission should send to the Legislature opposing the proposed staff cuts. Pam Killoran noted that SCDOL is also having staff eliminated. Mike Stoltz recommended that SCDOH be included in the letter. Members of the Commission discussed the need to address the eight-year freeze in the general fund property tax and reached consensus that the letter should include a proposal to increase the property tax in order to avoid draconian staffing and program reductions at SCDSS, SCDOH and SCDOL. Richard Koubek agreed to draft a letter that would be circulated via e-mail for Commission comment and for a vote prior to November 1<sup>st</sup>. [**Note:** The letter appended below was approved on October 31<sup>st</sup> by an e-mail vote: 17 – Yes; 0- No; 2- Abstentions (Jack Caffey; Roland Hampson.)]
3. **SCDSS Evening Hours:** A letter from SCDSS Commissioner Gregory Blass announcing the end of SCDSS evening hours was circulated and discussed. Richard Koubek noted the Commissioner's candor and concern about this decision which was forced on the Department by the staffing crisis as well as what appeared to be the failure of a significant number of clients to use the evening hours. Roland Hampson stated that this low utilization rate may be due to the ability of many clients to now enroll electronically in SCDSS programs. Mr. Koubek and other Commission members expressed regret that the complicated evening hours schedule that was unilaterally implemented by the County Executive may have been a factor in the low-levels of public participation in the program. There was consensus to possibly revisit this issue in the future.

4. **Federal Definition of Poverty:** Chair Richard Koubek announced that, with the rise in the Long Island poverty level and media attention to this problem, it would be good to look at alternative definitions of poverty other than the definition used by the federal government. He stated that a number of studies have called for the regionalization of the federal poverty level to reflect high-cost regions like Long Island where the “true” poverty level is believed to be twice that of the federal definition which is \$22,0509 for a family of four. He stated that, using a more realistic definition of poverty, Long Island would have a poverty rate of about 20% rather than the 6% reported by the federal government. He then introduced Don Friedman who gave an extensive and detailed analysis of alternative definitions of poverty which will be appended to the November Commission minutes. It was agreed that the Commission would review Mr. Friedman’s report and discuss at the November meeting how this information might be incorporated into the work of the Commission.
5. **Legislative Reauthorization of the Commission:** Mr. Koubek noted that the Commission is up for legislative reauthorization at the end of 2011. He suggested that The INN be removed from the Commission because they lack the staff to attend meetings and that a representative from the Suffolk County Department of Health be added. There was consensus to make these changes. Peggy Boyd suggested that a youth agency be added to the Commission. Mr. Koubek asked that members e-mail him recommendations for additional Commission representatives.
6. **Child Care Committee:** Chair Kathy Liguori reported on a difficult CPS situation she encountered. She again reiterated the need to maintain good communication between CPS and child-care providers as well as the need for additional PCAN trainings. She expressed regret that the County’s budget crisis would probably prevent the County from funding additional PCAN trainings. She will convene her Child Care Committee in the coming weeks to address the PCAN/CPS initiative.
7. **Employment Assessment Committee:** The Committee has not yet been able to agree on a meeting date to continue and to finalize their work. They hope to meet in November.
8. **Sober Homes Oversight Board:** Jeff Reynolds reported that the Oversight Board will be convening in the near future. Mike Stoltz noted that Seafield has been eliminated as a provider because of a technical conflict in the RFQ. He asked if the RFQ could be revised to accommodate Seafield and other non-OASAS contracted agencies. Mr. Koubek will pursue this with SCDSS Deputy Commissioner Ed Hernandez.
9. **Next Meeting:** Friday, November 18<sup>th</sup>, 9:30 AM, SCDOL One Stop Center.

**Commission Letter to the Legislature  
On Proposed 2012 Suffolk County DSS, DOH and DOL Staffing  
Cuts**

November 1, 2011

TO: Members of the Suffolk County Legislature

The Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature has assessed, with alarm and disbelief, the County Executive's Recommended 2012 Budget that contains program and staffing cuts so severe as to potentially cripple basic County services during a severe economic recession that has caused a surge in demand for these services. Of special concern to the Commission are the proposed elimination of 295 positions at the Suffolk County Department of Social Services (SCDSS,) 18 positions at the Suffolk County Department of Labor (SCDOL) and 223 positions at the Suffolk County Department of Health (SCDOH) which does not count those positions eliminated at the John J. Foley Skilled Nursing Facility. In a move that defies reason, some of these positions are 100% funded by the Federal and/or State governments.

To illustrate, between 2008 and 2011, SCDSS monthly caseloads rose dramatically in basic programs such as Medicaid (+39%), Emergency Housing/Singles (+40%), Family Assistance (+45%), Safety Net (+69%), Emergency Housing/Families (+69%) and Food Stamps (+109%). Nevertheless, the County Executive has proposed staffing reductions that, your Budget Review Office concluded, will result in a SCDSS "with overwhelmingly mandated responsibilities that will be dangerously straining its dwindling workforce beyond their limits."

The Commission appreciates the difficult fiscal crisis that the Legislature now faces as you try to reconcile the unrealistic and unreasonable provisions of the Recommended Budget with the economic and fiscal realities of Suffolk County. We fully agree with your BRO that most of the proposed staffing reductions at SCDSS, SCDOL and SCDOH are problematical.

We therefore urge you to carefully weigh all options to avoid these draconian staff and program reductions, including the possibility that, after 8 years of no increase in the general fund property tax, the time has come to consider modest increases in revenues.

The Commission urges you to consider all options so that appropriate revenues, funding and staffing can be provided to maintain services at SCDSS, SCDOL and SCDOH. Anything less will cause immeasurable harm to some of Suffolk's most vulnerable citizens and the nonprofit agencies that serve them while literally destabilizing essential Suffolk County government services.

Yours truly for the Commission,

*Richard Koubek*

Richard Koubek, PhD. Chair

*Kathy Liguori*

Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair