

Suffolk County Legislature



WELFARE TO WORK COMMISSION

of the Suffolk County Legislature
c/o Clerk of the Legislature
725 Veterans Memorial Highway
Smithtown NY 11787
631-499-6725

Richard Koubek, Ph.D., Chair
Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair

IDANIA APONTE
The INN

PETER BARNETT
Wyandanch Homes and Property
Development Corporation

PEGGY BOYD
Family Service League

GWENDOLYN BRANCH
LI Council of Churches

JACK CAFFEY
For Presiding Officer William Lindsay

JUDY CAHN
Eastern Suffolk BOCES

FRANK CASIGLIA
Suffolk County Association of
Municipal Employees

BRIDGET DEPASQUALE
Catholic Charities

DON FRIEDMAN
Empire Justice Center

JOAN GRANT
EOC of Suffolk County, Inc.

ROBERT GREENBERGER
F.E.G.S. Health and
Human Services System

ROLAND HAMPSON
Suffolk County Department of Social
Services

MICHAEL HAYNES
Long Island Cares, Inc.
Harry Chapin Food Bank

PAM KILLORAN
Suffolk County Workforce
Investment Board

RICHARD KOUBEK
Gerald Ryan Outreach Center

ELEN KRAKOW
Nassau/Suffolk Law Services

NINA LEONHARDT
Suffolk County Community College

KATHY LIGUORI
Tutor Time

ERIC LOPEZ
Suffolk County Department of Labor

MICHAEL STOLTZ
Clubhouse of Suffolk

February 21, 2011

TO: Members of the Suffolk County Legislature

The Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature is pleased to provide you with our 2011 annual report, as required by Resolution No. 181-2003. As you can see in the report, our Commission meets monthly, with committees that also meet regularly, to fulfill our charge of providing you with recommendations and analyses of policies related to welfare reform. We are pleased to have taken actions on all our 2010 goals, and plan to do so again with our 2011 goals that are contained in the report.

We hope that our report and recommendations on sober homes submitted to you in 2010 have been useful. We were pleased to see legislative action to create a SCDSS Request for Qualifications process that may lead to the implementation of some of the major recommendations in our sober homes report.

Yours truly for the Commission,

Richard Koubek

Kathy Liguori



**Annual Report to the Suffolk County Legislature
On the 2010 Activities of the
Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature**

February, 2011

As required by the 15th Resolve of Resolution No. 181-2003, the Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature is pleased to submit its annual report containing the Commission's goals for 2011 and a summary of its activities for 2010.

Commission 2011 Goals

1. Assess implementation of the recommendations in the Commission's 2010 sober homes report on policies and procedures to improve the oversight and delivery of services at sober homes in Suffolk County.
2. Continue to focus on the quality, availability and affordability of child care for working poor families and communication between child-care providers and the Suffolk County Department of Social Services (SCDSS) Child Protection Services Division.
3. Continue to assess evening hours at SCDSS centers.
4. Continue to assess staffing levels at SCDSS and the Suffolk County Department of Labor (SCDOL.)
5. Continue to assess the SCDSS and the SCDOL Employment Program with special attention to the new draft State policies and procedures for the employment assessment process and, where appropriate, make recommendations to each Department and to the Suffolk County Legislature.
6. Continue to work with SCDSS regarding mental health and chemical dependence assessments to maximize client placements and possibly reduce the number of sanctions.
7. Continue the progress made in 2010 with regard to SCDSS compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

8. Continue to assess and monitor educational opportunities provided to SCDSS and SCDOL clients.
9. Finalize work with SCDSS to create special lines of communication for non-profit social-services agencies, schools, health care professionals and others to better serve recipients of social services.
10. Assess Suffolk bus service as it relates to the needs of welfare clients and working poor people.
11. Monitor the impact of potential State Medicaid cuts on Suffolk County social services and health-treatment services.

Commission 2010 Activities

Sober Homes Report and On-going Assessment: The Commission followed its two October 2009 public hearings on sober homes with focus groups on January 29th, February 24th and April 1st, 2010 that engaged ten substance abuse treatment practitioners, sober-homes providers and legal experts in the field of sober homes. Their input, along with testimony from the 34 people who spoke at the public hearings in October 2009, written testimony provided by others, including Karen Carpenter Palumbo, Commissioner of the New York State Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS,) were folded into the Commission's report, *Recovery For Whom? The Urgent Need for Safe and Effective Sober Homes in Suffolk County*. The report was drafted by the Commission's Sober Homes Committee with the full Commission providing analysis and feedback on the draft. The final report, presented to the Legislature in May 2010, contains:

- an analysis of the impact that unregulated sober homes have on fragile communities as well as the fragile residents who are in recovery;
- a profile of the legal and political complexities involved in regulating sober homes;
- 11 specific recommendations to improve the regulation of sober homes and the delivery of services in these homes.

The report was covered in *Newsday* and was cited in an article published in the New York State Bar Association's *Government, Law and Policy Journal* in the fall 2010 edition, written by Sara Osborne and Robert Kent, attorneys with OASAS. The Osborne-Kent article contains recommendations that parallel the Commission's recommendations that will be studied by the Sober Homes Committee in 2011. As a follow-up to the report, Legislator Kate Browning introduced legislation, which was adopted in the summer of 2010, that will create a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) process by which SCDSS will create criteria and qualifications for approved sober homes to receive enhanced payments. The Commission in 2011 will monitor this RFQ process and may become involved in helping to draft legislation to create a Sober Homes Oversight Board. Unresolved has been the lack of action by OASAS to assume legal responsibility for regulating sober homes.

Child Care: The Commission continued to monitor the federal and State under-funding of subsidized child care for working poor families. Additionally, the Child Care

Committee of the Commission met with SCDSS Child Protective Services (CPS) staff as well as representatives of the Child Care Council of Suffolk to consider ways to improve communication between child care providers and CPS regarding at-risk children. Following a year's study, the Commission's Child Care Committee came to the following conclusions regarding CPS communication with child-care providers:

- SCDSS-CPS will inquire as to whether and how the State can improve its computer database so that child-care providers can be notified more expeditiously if an employee has been "indicated" in a CPS allegation.
- There appears to be a serious gap in the notification process to child care providers when a court has issued an Order of Protection. This gap may need to be closed by State legislations.
- SCDSS-CPS will explore whether and how transitional child-care services can be provided to families who are leaving the CPS system.
- The improvement of communication between CPS workers and child care providers is severely impeded by federal and State confidentiality regulations. There may be some opportunities to improve this communication through one and two party release forms, on a case-by-case basis.
- Child care providers would benefit greatly from more site visits by CPS workers.
- The Commission's work on improving CPS communications with child care providers was partially responsible for SCDSS receiving a State grant that will be used, in part, for the Child Care Council of Suffolk to present CPS training modules to child care providers.

Understaffing at SCDSS and SCDOL: The Commission's 2010 goal to "continue to assess staffing levels at SCDSS and the Suffolk County Department of Labor" was addressed throughout the year. The Commission continues to receive quarterly reports on SCDSS staffing levels from the legislative Budget Review Office. SCDSS has been very cooperative and forthright in providing staffing data to the Commission. While the data show dramatic increases in the demand for services such as a 30% increase in the Medicaid caseload, an 84% increase in the Food Stamp caseload and a 42% increase in the Temporary Assistance cases, SCDSS staffing increase by only 9% between 2008 and 2010 with vacancies increasing by 32%. The vacancies were due in large part to the early retirement package, with the 2011 budget authorizing 117 new SCDSS positions. Additionally, due to the use of overtime and significant management efficiencies, the "days to disposition" of Client Benefits and Medicaid applications improved between 2009 and 2010. The Commission has concerns about staff vacancies and the use of overtime that could take a toll on employees. The Commission will continue to monitor SCDSS staffing throughout 2011. SCDOL staffing will be a priority in 2011.

Employment Assessment: Two other goals of the Commission in 2010 were to "continue to assess the SCDSS and SCDOL Employment Program with special attention to the work rules in the federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program and to "work with SCDSS regarding intake assessment forms and procedures...so as to improve mental health and chemical dependence assessments, compliance with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements and ultimately, reduce the number of sanctions at SCDSS."

- Regarding the TANF statute and regulations, Commission recommendations made in 2008 were reviewed and it was agreed that this issue would be pursued in 2010 as the Obama Administration in Washington prepares for TANF reauthorization in 2011. Unfortunately, there has been little or no movement by the President Obama's Department of Health and Human Services to repeal or modify the punitive work requirements imposed by the previous administration. The Commission receives periodic updates on TANF proposals from member Don Friedman of the Empire Justice Center who is working with State and national coalitions to assess whether and how TANF regulations could be made less punitive.
- Regarding the SCDSS intake and assessment forms and procedures, the Commission's Employment Assessment Committee met with SCDSS staff and together designed a "Did You Know?" flyer that contains the rights and services available to persons with disabilities. Additionally, these discussions have led to personnel changes at SCDSS centers that will assign staff to help an applicant's or a recipient's need for reasonable accommodations due to a disability.

The Committee also worked with SCDSS to create changes in the application process that would allow nonprofit case managers to work closely with SCDSS staff to finalize work with SCDSS to create special lines of communication for non-profit social services agencies, schools, health care professionals and others to better serve their clients. The Commission will work to conclude this process in 2011 with the development of a release form to permit nonprofit and SCDSS staff to exchange information on a client.

Affordable Housing Updates: The Commission's goal to "revisit its 2007 *Affordable For Whom?*" report on the lack of affordable housing in Suffolk was pursued with an April 9th presentation by Michael White, Executive Director of the Long Island Regional Planning Commission (LIRPC). Mr. White linked affordable housing to the LIRPC's 2035 *Regional Comprehensive Sustainability Plan*. He gave examples of Smart Growth developments at various Suffolk locations such as Patchogue and he outlined continuing barriers to the creation of affordable housing such as slow town and County approval processes, local NIMBY opposition and high property taxes. On July 9th, the Commission heard an extensive report from Jill Rosen-Nikoloff, Director of Affordable Housing for Suffolk County. She provided a detailed overview of policy changes and programs to expedite the creation of affordable housing, including the 72 Land Transfer Program, the County's fast-track program for affordable housing, the use of Transfer Development Rights and land acquisition policies. The Commission was pleased to note that many of the recommendations in its 2007 report were being implemented by the County, with Ms. Rosen-Nikoloff reporting that almost 2,000 affordable-housing units having been created in the past several years.

Sunday Bus Service: While not a 2010 goal, in the fall the Commission took up Legislator Jay Schneiderman's resolution to create a pilot project for Sunday bus service since this was seen as an issue which profoundly affects people on welfare and working poor people. The Commission endorsed his resolution that had been defeated by one vote in October. Following the endorsement, the resolution passed with 11 votes in December but was vetoed by County Executive Levy. On February 1st, 2011, the Legislature did

not vote to override the veto. Continued assessment of Suffolk County bus service for the poor will be a goal pursued during 2011.

Conclusion: The Commission meets monthly, always with a quorum, and has created several committees that also meet to pursue issues such as Sober Homes, Child Care and Employment Assessment. The Commission members have worked tirelessly, and will continue to do so, to fulfill our legislative mandate to “evaluate and make recommendations of federal, State and county policies and procedures to move people from welfare to work.”

Respectfully Submitted,

Legislator Kate Browning, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee
Richard Koubek, Ph.D., Commission Chair, Gerald Ryan Outreach Center
Kathy Liguori, Commission Vice Chair, Tutor Time
Idania Aponte, The INN
Peter Barnett, Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corporation
Peggy Boyd, Family Service League
Gwendolyn Branch, Long Island Council of Churches
Jack Caffey, For Presiding Officer William Lindsay
Judy Cahn, Eastern Suffolk BOCES
Frank Casiglia, Suffolk County Association of Municipal Employees
Bridget DePasquale, Catholic Charities
Don Friedman, Empire Justice Center
Joan Grant, EOC of Suffolk County
Robert Greenberger, FECS Health and Human Services System
Roland Hampson, Suffolk County Department of Social Services
Michael Haynes, Long Island Cares, Harry Chapin Food Bank
Pam Killoran, Suffolk County Workforce Investment Board
Ellen Krakow, Nassau/Suffolk Law Services
Nina Leonhardt, Suffolk County Community College
Eric Lopez, Suffolk County Department of Labor
Michael Stoltz, Clubhouse of Suffolk