

**Welfare to Work Commission
Of the Suffolk County Legislature**

Minutes of the April 8, 2011 Meeting

Present: Richard Koubek, Chair; Legislator Kate Browning; Roland Hampson; Peter Barnett; Frank Casiglia; Rob Greenberger; Jack Caffey; Vinnie Cassidy for Pam Killoran
Nina Leonhardt; Peggy Boyd; Jeffrey Reynolds.

Excused: Eric Lopez; Bridget DePasquale; Don Friedman; Gwen Branch; Michael Haynes; Ellen Krakow; Fred Combs for Joan Grant; Idania Aponte; Mike Stoltz; Judy Cahn.

Guest: Dr. Edward Hernandez, Deputy Commissioner, SCDSS

1. **Minutes:** Minutes of the March Commission meeting were tabled pending clarification of the child care section.
2. **Sober Homes RFQ:**
 - a. Dr. Hernandez reported that the deadline for filing an RFQ was 3 PM today, April 8, 2011. As of 9AM, they had received two RFQs but expected more to be received by the time of the deadline. Chair Richard Koubek asked Dr. Hernandez if the New York State Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) had offered to help with the SCDSS pilot program. He responded that they had not other than to refer the SCDSS sober-homes pilot program to other counties for consideration. It was his belief that OASAS was not prepared to draft sober-home guidelines nor to assume any responsibility for oversight of sober homes.
 - b. Dr. Hernandez reiterated that SCDSS has the resources and the legal authority to regulate only health and safety issues, not the behavioral or treatment components of an RFQ approved sober home. He also stated that the SC Department of Mental Hygiene should be involved in the process.
 - c. A number of Commission members commented that the RFQ criteria were very narrow and eliminated small, independent sober-home providers from qualifying for the enhanced rate. This was especially true regarding the requirement that the sober home be a nonprofit and that it be a certified OASAS treatment provider. Dr. Hernandez stated that independent sober homes could become subcontracted by certified OASAS agencies. He and others agreed that this RFQ round is a pilot project that could be expanded if it is successful.
 - d. Richard Koubek reminded the Commission that the Sober Homes Committee had discussed as far back as the spring of 2010 the need to adopt County legislation that would create a Suffolk County Sober Homes Oversight Board to assist SCDSS in monitoring the agencies that submitted RFQs. He informed Legislator Browning that the Commission

could be of help in drafting this legislation. It was agreed that a Sober Homes Committee meeting be convened in the near future to assess the creation of an Oversight Board.

3. **SCDSS Staffing:**

- a. Peter Barnett reported that the SCDSS staffing workshop he facilitated at the March 25th LI Jobs with Justice conference, "Working But Still Poor," held at the Tuoro Law Center, was well attended with about 25 people, many professionals from nonprofits that serve poor people. He thought there was much interest in the Commission's 2008 SCDSS staffing report that he distributed and that there was much empathy and understanding for the difficulties faced by SCDSS in trying to accommodate enormous increases in the demand for services.
- b. Peter Barnett stated that some people at the workshop expressed skepticism regarding the data showing that the SCDSS processing times for applications have actually improved despite flat staffing numbers and the increases in the number of applicants. Roland Hampson said that SCDSS reported NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) application processing times for Suffolk County. He distributed a copy of the State reports to Mr. Koubek.
- c. Roland Hampson stated that he was very sorry that he could not be present, under advice from counsel, at the "Working But Still Poor" conference. He referred to the latest staffing data that was distributed at the workshop, noting that overtime, electronic filings and administrative efficiencies have allowed the Department to keep pace with the demand. He stated that the high productivity of the staff has worked against the Department being able to expand the size of the staff. For example, it is very difficult to make a case that Child Support Enforcement Bureau is understaffed when it's the #1 child support collection agency in the State. Peter Barnett reiterated his position expressed many times that SCDSS must fill all vacancies that are 100% funded by the federal or state governments. Mr. Koubek reiterated his concern that too much overtime could burn out the staff or lead to inefficiencies.

4. **Commission Member Change:** Peter Barnett, who holds the Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corp. seat on the Commission, announced that he is retiring as Executive Director. Richard Koubek stated that the new Executive Director, Debbie R. Joseph, will replace Mr. Barnett on the Commission. Mr. Koubek warmly thanked Mr. Barnett for his years of excellent service to the Commission.

5. **Suffolk County Sunday Bus Service:** Mr. Koubek announced that Legislator Jay Schneiderman's resolution to create an east-end pilot for Sunday bus service beginning in the summer of 2011 was passed by the Legislature by a veto-proof vote of 16 to 2. Mr. Koubek noted that County Executive Levy asked the Department of Public Works to survey east-end riders as to whether they were willing to pay the additional 50 cent fare to receive Sunday service. The results were 80% in favor of the increased fare. The second resolution calling for Sunday bus service for the remainder of the County beginning in 2012 has been tabled while the Department of

Public Works conducts an analysis of the 9 proposed routes. This resolution should be acted upon in the coming months.

6. New York State Budget and Suffolk Health Centers:

- a. Mr. Koubek reported that the Full-Family Sanctioning proposal had been removed from Governor Cuomo's 2011 budget but that the scheduled increase in the welfare grant was not approved.
- b. Mr. Koubek also stated that that State had made serious cuts in Medicaid which will have a very negative impact on County, particularly the health centers. These cuts, on top of the "clawback" in which the State has demanded almost \$20 million from the County for "unauthorized" on-going (as opposed to preventive) treatment services provided by the health centers as far back as 2008, could be devastating. He noted that Suffolk County Health Commissioner James Tomarken had been asked to send a representative to today's Commission meeting to provide a briefing on the health centers. Commissioner Tomarken declined because he felt that the issue was very much in flux at this time. Two of the centers may be closed: the Dolan Center in Huntington and Elsie Owens Center in Coram. Legislator Browning stated that the health centers have been asked to increase the enrollment of their patients in Medicaid. Those without insurance who do not qualify for Medicaid and require on-going treatment will be sent to hospital emergency rooms. Peggy Boyd announced that the Department of Health is holding a public hearing on the health centers on April 14. Chair Richard Koubek stated that he planned to attend and urged other Commission members to do so as well.

7. Next Meeting: Friday, May 13th, 9:30 AM in Conference Room A of the SCDOL One Stop Center.