

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

Minutes of the March 12, 2010 Meeting

Present: Richard Koubek, Chair; Idania Aponte; Ellen Krakow; Jack Caffey; Gwen Branch; Don Friedman; Judy Cahn; Roland Hampson; Vincent Cassidy for Pam Killoran; Frank Casiglia; Peter Barnett; Michael Haynes; Jane Devine; Peggy Boyd; Mike Stoltz

Excused: Kathy Liguori, Nina Leonhardt; Joan Grant; Bridget DePasquale; Eric Lopez; Rob Greenberger

Guest: Josh Slaughter for Legislator Kate Browning

1. **Minutes:** The minutes of the February 19th meeting were accepted unanimously with revisions on a motion by Mike Stoltz, seconded by Don Friedman
2. **Sober Homes Committee:** Richard Koubek announced that, through the efforts of Jack Caffey, Ellen Krakow and Legislator Kate Browning, a meeting has been arranged for April 1st between the Sober Homes Committee and Nassau/Suffolk Law Services attorney Rob Briglio, legislative council George Nolan and an attorney from the County Executive's office, to discuss the recent federal court decision overturning the 2003 Suffolk County sober homes law. Mr. Koubek expressed his hope that this meeting might identify principles which could be incorporated into a revised County sober homes law which would be in compliance with the federal Fair Housing Act and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA.) These principles might be included as recommendations in the Commission's sober homes report to the Legislature. Jack Caffey noted that it would be helpful if the attorneys had the Commission's questions in advance of the April 1st meeting. Mr. Koubek asked if Commission members had questions or other issues that should be raised with the attorneys.
 - a. Sober Homes Committee Co-Chair Michael Stoltz stated that he would like the attorneys to address the reasons why towns do not enforce their own codes against sober homes that violate these codes.
 - b. Jack Caffey said that all parties need to know the limits set by the law and the various interpretations of these limits.
 - c. Mr. Stoltz asked that any additional questions be emailed to him by March 22nd.
3. **Monthly Staffing Report:** Roland Hampson presented the Commission with the monthly staffing report. He said that, despite flat staffing levels over the last few months and rising requests for services, applications have been processed in accordance with State regulations with the use of temporary staff, part time staff and overtime. A discussion of staffing ensued.
 - a. Frank Casiglia pointed out that the staff feels overwhelmed by the demands placed on them. Mr. Casiglia also said that SCDSS workers are

experiencing other stresses such as the lack of basic supplies. Mr. Hampson promised to follow up on the supplies issue.

- b. Ellen Krakow said that the Long Island tenant courts are being flooded with evictions. Roland Hampson added that homelessness is up significantly, with the staff struggling to place 30-40 families a month in permanent housing. Frank Casiglia said homelessness is placing additional strains on SCDSS staff. Mr. Casiglia also said that the new Medicaid staff has had a high turnover rate because some of the new employees had difficulty adjusting to the heavy workload.
 - c. Mr. Casiglia said that the union is hosting retirement seminars and that they anticipate many retirements in the coming months because of the high stress levels among staff. A number of Commission members expressed concern about further lags in SCDSS services since retirements require long training periods for the replacement staff.
 - d. Richard Koubek reminded the Commission that the SCDSS staffing report at the February meeting showed a significant increase in requests for services and an 8% staff vacancy rate. The vacancies are less than 2009 but the staffing levels remain low compared with the demand for services.
4. **Employment Assessment Committee:** In the absence of Chair Rob Greenberger, Ellen Krakow reported on the Committee's March 8th meeting to further assess SCDSS-ADA policies and procedures. Richard Koubek pointed out that the primary goal of this ADA assessment was not to provide an overall judgment on SCDSS-ADA compliance but rather to identify policies and procedures that might enhance the identification of disabled clients so as to reduce sanctions. He said that he and Commissioner Blass agreed that it would be helpful if the Commission could identify 5-10 recommendations for implementation that were provided in the ADA assessment report submitted in 2009 by Cary LaCheen of the National Center for Law and Economic Justice. Toward this end, Ms. Krakow reported on two proposals that were discussed at the March 8th meeting:
- a. Using examples of exemplary informational documents provided by consultant Cary LaCheen, Ms. Krakow distributed a draft "Did You Know?" informational flyer for incoming clients and for staff that would clarify: (1) the definitions of disabilities; (2) the rights of disabled people; (3) services and accommodations that SCDSS can and should provide to assist disabled people. Mr. Koubek noted that this informational flyer covers about five of Ms. LaCheen's SCDSS-ADA recommendations. Mr. Hampson said that the draft "Did You Know?" flyer was well received by Commissioner Greg Blass and is being distributed to SCDSS directors for comment. There was wide Commission support for the draft document, with a number of ancillary questions raised: (1) How will the SC Department of Labor interface with the documents? (2) Is the SCDSS and SC DOL staff trained to recognize disabilities? (3) When will the State release the long-awaited mental health assessment tool that will place less reliance on self disclosure? Don Friedman noted that OTDA is about to begin pilot testing a new screening tool which will take three years to validate. He hopes for an interim OTDA tool during the pilot-test period.

- b. Peter Barnett reminded the Commission that not-for-profit agencies often have social workers on staff who could help to pre-screen SCDSS clients for disabilities. He asked that the members of the SCDSS Liaison Committee which he is chairing be available for its first meeting in the coming weeks to begin exploring policies and procedures that could help SCDSS interface more efficiently with not-for-profit agency staff. Peggy Boyd said that at a recent meeting of the Commissioner's Advisory Council (CAC,) Linda O'Donohoe offered to serve as a liaison with the agencies. Mr. Koubek suggested that either Ms. O'Donohoe or Mr. Hampson serve on the SCDSS Liaison Committee, which Mr. Hampson agreed to explore.
 - c. Ms. Krakow next presented the second proposal from the Employment Assessment Committee which was for a supervisor at each SCDSS center to be designated as the ADA point person to whom case workers could turn for ADA questions or policy clarifications if they have concerns about a person's disability status. Mr. Hampson said that he believed supervisors are already on hand at each center for this purpose. Mr. Koubek noted that this proposal could replicate the successful child care model in which staff from the Child Care Council of Suffolk are assigned to SCDSS and SCDOL sites to expedite child care placements. Ms. Krakow said that using a not-for-profit agency might be a fallback recommendation, but that having a SCDSS supervisor empowered to make decisions regarding accommodations for disabled clients is the better alternative. Mr. Hampson agreed to bring this proposal back to the Commissioner for further discussion which will be pursued at the next Committee meeting.
 - d. Ms. Krakow announced that her agency, Nassau/Suffolk Law Services, is providing trainings for agencies to help them comply with the ADA. She offered these trainings to SCDSS. Mr. Casiglia offered to help arrange these trainings for his members. Mr. Hampson agreed to consider offering the trainings to SCDSS staff.
5. **SCDSS Evening Hours:** Roland Hampson distributed a chart showing the utilization of SCDSS evening hours from February, 2009 through February 2010. The data showed that between December, 2009 and February, 2010 (the height of the HEAP season,) the centers averaged 77 clients per night. "Emergency Needs" had the highest numbers.
- a. Mr. Koubek noted that emergency needs for the working poor were the primary goal of evening hours and that the data were promising. Mr. Stoltz agreed with this assessment.
 - b. Mr. Hampson and Mr. Casiglia pointed out that a number of clients who came in for "Eligibility Assistance" or who were "Walk In" clients, both categories being people who could have come in during daytime hours but chose not to. They both felt that the evening hour's utilization numbers were disappointing, as did some Commission members. Mr. Hampson said that he did not know if the data were duplicated persons and that he would seek clarification on this.

- c. Mr. Barnett asked that we not discount the “Walk In” people since they relieve pressure on the daytime staff.
 - d. Ms. Krakow noted that the rotating hours are very complex and not widely understood by the public. Mr. Koubek said that he, and probably most members of the Commission, did not know evening hours schedule for each center.
 - e. There was consensus among Commission members that all the centers should have the same day set aside for evening hours (e.g., the third Wednesday of each month,) rather than the rotating schedule currently used.
 - f. Mr. Koubek again expressed disappointment that there had not been more publicity announcing evening hours and SCDSS services available to the working poor. He suggested that Commissioner Blass ask County Executive Steve Levy to call upon LIPA and National Grid to publicize evening hours in their billing inserts. Mr. Hampson agreed to pursue this request.
 - g. Peggy Boyd again asked if evening hours could be arranged so that the entire staff is not required to stay, as is apparently done in NCDSS. Mr. Hampson reiterated that state regulation requires DSS districts to accept all applications and to meet immediate emergency needs.
6. **EFSP Cut:** Richard Koubek reported that the Commission’s letter regarding Suffolk County’s loss of \$1 million Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) funds was modified for distribution at the March 3rd interfaith conference on Long Island Hunger co-sponsored by MICAH, HANNYS and Bread for the World. About 130 people attended the conference and were asked to publish the letter in their congregational bulletins on the weekend of March 26-28. Commissioner Greg Blass spoke to the conference and urged attendees to advocate for restoration of the EFSP funds.
 7. **Affordable Housing Update:** Mr. Koubek announced that Michael White, Executive Director of the Nassau/Suffolk Regional Planning Council and Jill Rosen-Nikoloff, Director of the Suffolk County Affordable Housing office, have been invited to address the Commission at the April 9th meeting regarding progress in developing affordable housing, as per the recommendations in the Commission’s 2007 affordable housing report to the Legislature. Both have accepted the invitation.
 8. **Reauthorizing the Commission:** Mr. Koubek announced that the legislation creating the Commission expires at the end of 2011 and that a resolution reauthorizing the Commission needs to be introduced. Mr. Slaughter agreed to inform Legislator Browning of this need.
 9. **Next Meeting: Friday, April 9th, 9:30 AM** in Conference Room A of the SCDOL One Stop Center.