

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

Minutes of the September 11th, 2009 Meeting

Present: Richard Koubek, Chair; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair; Legislator Kate Browning; Ellen Krakow; Roland Hampson; Jack Caffey; Peggy Boyd; Rob Greenberger; Nina Leonhardt; Peter Barnett; Bridget DePasquale; Don Friedman ; Ken Zone; Eric Lopez; Pam Killoran; Gina Caporaso for Idania Aponte; Frank Casiglia for Kathy Malloy

Excused: Gwen Branch; Judy Cahn; Mike Stoltz, Fred Combs for Joan Grant; Jane Devine

1. **September 11th Reflection:** Chair Richard Koubek asked that the Commission observe a moment of silence for the lives lost in the September 11th terrorist attacks which were underway eight years ago, at the very hour of this meeting.
2. **August Committee Meetings:** The Chair reminded the Commission that, in lieu of a full meeting in August, there were these committee meetings: two Sober Home Hearing Committee meetings; a Staffing Committee meeting; two Child Care Committee meetings.
3. **Minutes:** The minutes of the September 10th meeting were accepted unanimously, without changes, on a motion by Don Friedman, seconded by Kathy Liguori.
4. **SCDSS Staffing Committee:** Richard Koubek reported that the Committee would now be chaired by Peter Barnett. The Committee met on August 14th to review staffing data provided by Commissioner Greg Blass and Roland Hampson at the July meeting.
 - a. The data revealed that the number of days to disposition of new applications for Family Assistance was 55 (where the State requires 30 days) and the number of days for disposition of new Safety Net applications was 60 (where the State requires 45 days.) The Committee believes that part of the reason for these delays may have been the persistence of 8.8% vacancies in the Client Benefits Division, along with an annual increase in the demand for services, as reported by the legislative Budget Review Office, of 6.8% for Family Assistance and 17.5% for Safety Net Families.
 - b. The Committee learned that over the summer the County Executive had responded to a request by Commissioner Blass that SCINs be signed to fill 20 of 27 vacancies in Client Benefits.
 - c. The Committee also observed discrepancies in the State-mandated case loads for Child Protective Services workers, but it was decided to take no action since SCDSS seemed to be addressing this problem.
 - d. A motion was made by Jack Caffey, seconded by Kathy Liguori, to send a letter drafted by the Committee to the members of the Legislature informing them of the delays in Client Benefits application processing times, and the possible link between these delays and SCDSS Client

Benefits Division staff vacancies. The letter would also commend Commissioner Blass and County Executive Steve Levy for approving the SCINs to fill 20 of 27 vacancies in Client Benefits and call on them to fill the remaining seven vacancies.

- e. There was some discussion of minor changes in the draft letter. The motion to approve the letter as amended (see below) was adopted: Yes - 12; No -0; Abstentions: - 3 (Roland Hampson; Pam Killoran; Eric Lopez)
5. **Sober Homes Hearing Committee:** Co-chair Peggy Boyd reported that the Committee met twice over the summer. One meeting took place at a Seafield sober home in Flanders.
- a. Kathy Ayers-Lanzillata, Co-Chair of the New York State Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) Residential Treatment and Recovery Homes Workgroup attended the meetings. Beth Brockland of LI CAN also attended one of the meetings as did several representatives of RHALI, two groups currently working to create a network of approved sober homes. In addition, Richard Koubek spoke with OASAS Workgroup Co-Chair, Rob Kemp, who is also Chief Counsel at OASAS. While there were some concerns expressed by OASAS, LI CAN and RHALI about the hearing becoming a NIMBY forum, there also appeared to be growing acceptance on their part that the hearing could help to advance the cause of legitimizing sober homes.
 - b. The Committee wrestled with the difficulties of creating sober home regulations for that do not violate Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protections provided to chemically-dependent people. Such regulations have been struck down as discriminatory. Currently, sober homes are not legal entities with regulatory standards imposed by OASAS or SCDSS or the Department of Health at the County or State levels.
 - c. The Committee noted the need for some government regulatory standards as well as voluntary standards set by the profession. Toward this end, it was agreed that there would be two public hearings, one on Friday, October 23rd, in the legislative auditorium in Hauppauge, and the second at Riverhead Town Hall on Friday, October 30th.
 - d. Peggy Boyd introduced two version of the hearing flyer, each with its own title and focus questions. After much discussion, there was agreement that the hearing should use the term “sober home” (in quotes) rather than the term “recovery home.” There was also agreement on the focus questions contained in the flyer appended to these minutes below.
 - e. Kathy Liguori moved, and Frank Casiglia seconded, a motion to adopt the flyer as amended (see below). The motion was approved: Yes - 15; No - 0; Abstentions – 2 (Eric Lopez and Pam Killoran)
6. **SCDSS Evening Hours Flyer:**
- a. Richard Koubek announced that Maryellen Shpak, Communications Coordinator for National Grid, was working with the Commission to include the evening hours flyer information in the National Grid and LIPA newsletters mailed to every account in Suffolk as well as to add this information to the trifold “financial assistance” flyer sent to accounts that

are in danger of or already are in arrears. She also would work on getting information in the flyer distributed by National Grid Customer Service agents. Maryellen Shpak also will work to have the flyer included in the October "Low Income Forum."

- b. The Suffolk county Water Authority Board, at the request of Jane Devine, will include a brief reference to the new evening hours in its newsletter/message to customers.
- c. The Commission discussed the distribution of the flyer by all Commission member agencies as well as by the following organizations:
 - i. Health and Welfare Council of LI
 - ii. Suffolk Community Council
 - iii. Nassau Suffolk Coalition for the Homeless
 - iv. SCDSS contract agencies
 - v. Island Harvest
 - vi. Suffolk school superintendents (Roland Hampson will pass the flyer to the superintendent's association representative on the SCDSS Commissioner's Advisory Council)
 - vii. All legislative offices
- d. It was agreed that the Commission will hold a press conference on November 3rd, the start of HEAP season, to publicize SCDSS evening hours. Roland Hampson will help to organize this press conference.

7. Child Care Committee:

- a. Kathy Liguori reported that the Committee held two preliminary meetings over the summer with Child Protective Service (CPS) administrators Dennis Nowak and Mark Clavin and with child care industry leaders, including representatives of Every Child Matters and the Child Care Council of Suffolk. While there was agreement that the confidentiality of CPS families and especially CPS children must be protected, there was also agreement that legally-permissible enhanced communication between CPS workers and child care providers should be explored.
- b. There are situations in which child care teachers are not aware that they have CPS children in their classes, which create problems when these children act out due to their special circumstances. Toward the goal of improving communication between CPS workers and child care providers to better meet the needs of children, the Committee will work to:
 - i. Host a workshop or seminar to improve communication between CPS workers and child care providers;
 - ii. Create a training, through the Child Care Council, to help providers improve their skills in dealing with children who come from special circumstances such as a CPS supervised home.
- c. Richard Koubek and Peter Barnett noted that this plan is similar to the proposal Mr. Barnett introduced to Commissioner Blass at the July Commission meeting for special trainings to improve communication and cooperation between community social-service organizations and SCDSS. Community organizations often have social workers on staff, for example, which SCDSS does not have, who can be trained to expedite

SCDSS services for their clients. While child care providers have very unique CPS parameters, the overarching theme of getting community agencies to work more closely with SCDSS staff is the same. Roland Hampson said that he and the Commissioner are interested in pursuing this concept.

8. **Employment Assessment Committee:** Chair Rob Greenberger announced that the Committee would be meeting on September 16th to take up ADA issues.
9. **Commission Membership in Health and Welfare Council of LI and Suffolk Community Council:** The Commission reached consensus that it should not become a formal member of these two social-service umbrella organizations because they sometimes take up advocacy positions that might be outside the legislative charge of the Commission. It was agreed that the Chair and Vice Chair should become individual members of the two organizations.

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

Letter to the Legislature on SCDSS Staff Vacancies

September 11, 2009

TO: Members of the Suffolk County Legislature

Since October, 2008, the Welfare to Work Commission has twice called attention to the increased demand for services at SCDSS due to the recession while staff vacancies persist. The Commission has been receiving on-going reports from the legislative Budget Review Office that confirm SCDSS staff vacancies of 8% to 11%.

In July the Commission received responses from SCDSS to a series of questions about client/case worker ratios and application processing times in various key Departments. Our goal was to determine whether these staff vacancies were directly impacting service delivery. The following significant trends are evident in the Client Benefits Administration:

- The BRO reports that services rose in June 2009 at an annual rate of 6.8% for Family Assistance (FA) and 17.5% for Safety Net Family (SNF) Assistance while the staff vacancy rate in Client Benefits was 8.8% in June, 2009 (27 positions.)
- In June, the number of days to disposition of new applications was 55 for FA and 60 for SN where 30 and 45 days respectively are required by the State.

The Commission was pleased to learn that, responding to Commissioner Blass' requests, County Executive Steve Levy signed SCINs over the summer for 20 vacant Client Benefits positions, but this leaves 7 vacancies that we believe will continue to contribute to delays in the processing of applications, particularly as more applications continue to be submitted until the economy turns around. We therefore recommend that the Legislature urge the County Executive to fill all remaining vacancies in Client Benefits.

Yours truly for the Commission,

Richard Koubek

Richard Koubek, Ph.D., Chair

Kathy Liguori

Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair

Sober Homes Hearing Flyer



RECOVERY FOR WHOM?

Creating a Network of Safe and Effective “Sober Homes” for Suffolk Residents Who Are Chemically Dependent

Have Your Voice Heard at a Public Hearing

Sponsored by:

The Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature

Friday, October 23rd, 2009

9:00 AM to 1:00 PM

William Rogers Legislative Building, Hauppauge

or

Friday, October 30th, 2009

9:00 AM to 1:00 PM

Riverhead Town Hall

This public hearing is being held for housing and treatment experts and the public to speak up about the need for clean, safe, responsible and effective housing options, compatible with the neighborhoods where they operate, for chemically dependent Suffolk residents to attain recovery. The hearing will lead to a report to the Suffolk County Legislature. If you wish to testify at the hearing, please address these questions:

1. What is a “sober home?”
2. Are “sober homes” doing their intended jobs?
3. How should “sober homes” properly fit in their community?
4. What types of “sober homes” do we need?
5. What is the ideal “sober home” for a community?
6. What can New York State, Suffolk County, town and village governments do to create, regulate and monitor this housing?