

Suffolk County Legislature



WELFARE TO WORK COMMISSION

of the Suffolk County Legislature
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Long Island Cares, Inc.
Harry Chapin Food Bank

TO: Members of the Suffolk County Legislature

The Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature is pleased to provide you with our 2009 annual report, as required by Resolution No. 181-2003. As you can see in the report, our Commission meets monthly, with subcommittees 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 2008 goals, and plan to do so again with our 2009 goals that are contained in the report.

We hope that our reports and recommendations have been useful to you, as we provided them in 2008, in these policy areas:

- Evening hours at Suffolk County Department of Social Services (SCDSS)
- Understaffing at SCDSS
- The impact of federal TANF regulations on SCDSS and Suffolk County Department of labor (SCDOL)

Yours truly for the Commission,

Richard Koubek

Richard Koubek, Ph.D., Chair

Kathy Liguori

Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair



**Annual Report to the Suffolk County Legislature
On the 2008 Activities of the
Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature**

March, 2009

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 2009 and a summary of its activities for 2008.

Commission 2009 Goals

1. Continue to monitor Suffolk County Department of Social Services (SCDSS) reimbursements to child care providers and focus on the quality, availability and affordability of child care for working poor families, with the possibility of holding a public hearing on child care for the working poor and creating a pilot program that addresses these concerns.
2. Continue to explore opening SCDSS centers one evening a week.
3. Continue to assess staffing levels at SCDSS and the Suffolk County Department of Labor (SCDOL,) including the chronic pattern of unfilled, authorized SCDSS and SCDOL staff positions.
4. Continue to assess the SCDSS and the SCDOL Employment Program with special attention to the work rules in the federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and, where appropriate, make recommendations to each Department and to the Suffolk County Legislature and to the Suffolk County congressional delegation.
5. Work with SCDSS regarding intake assessment forms and procedures, in conjunction with the possible release of a new Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) assessment tool, so as to improve mental health and chemical dependence assessments, compliance with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act requirements and ultimately, reduce the number of sanctions at SCDSS.

Commission 2008 Activities

Completed Goals: The Commission had seven goals for 2008, two of which were successfully completed:

1. The goal to “update the Commission’s membership” was completed with the adoption of IR 1497-2008 that added the following organizations to the Commission: Empire Justice Center; Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corporation; Family Service League, Suffolk County Association of Municipal Employees and the removal of a representative from the Suffolk School Superintendent’s Association.
2. The goal to “continue to monitor implementation of the Commission’s Education and Training Pilot program” was completed with the inclusion of this program as a Suffolk County Community College activity.

SCDSS Evening Hours: The Commission’s 2008 goal of assessing “the possibility of opening SCDSS one evening a week” to accommodate working poor people was pursued throughout the year by the Commission paying close attention to the SCDSS Commissioner’s report on evening hours released in the spring of 2008 in response to the Commission’s November, 2007 letter to the Legislature supporting the concept of evening hours. In addition, the Commission assessed Legislator John Kennedy’s November resolution calling for a report on instituting SCDSS evening hours on a rotating basis. In December, the County Executive ordered a plan for evening hours on a rotating basis that closes each center on the morning that it is open in the evening. The Legislature has taken issue with this approach and, in adopting IR 1019 in January, 2009, the Legislature directed the County Executive to rescind his plan. The County Executive vetoed IR 1019, and the Legislature chose not to override his veto. Discussions are underway between the Legislature and the County Executive to resolve their differences on SCDSS evening hours. The Commission continues to support the concept of evening hours and will take up some of the technical issues that need to be resolved in order to implement a workable evening hours plan that accommodates the needs of both clients and staff. This issue will be pursued in 2009.

Understaffing at SCDSS and SCDOL: The Commission’s 2008 goal of assessing “a chronic pattern ... of unfilled, authorized” staff positions was addressed in an October, 2008 report by the Commission to the Legislature: *A Report on Understaffing at the Suffolk County Department of Social Services*. This report provided a detailed assessment of chronic understaffing, as well as five recommendations to rectify the understaffing. Two of the recommendations have been acted upon:

1. As per the report’s recommendation that positions which have “100 percent federal or State reimbursement” should be quickly filled, the 2009 budget analysis of the legislative Budget Review Office made the same recommendation and the Legislature authorized the hiring of additional Food Stamp workers for 2009, positions that are 100 percent reimbursed. This issue will be pursued in 2009.
2. The report’s central recommendation that the Legislature’s Health and Human Services Committee “require a monthly SCDSS report” has also been

implemented. The first report was received in February, 2009. This issue will be pursued in 2009.

Child Care: The Commission also pursued the goal of assessing the “quality, availability and affordability of child care” in 2008. The Commission’s Child Care Committee invited several prominent members of the child-care provider’s community to discuss how this goal could be achieved. There was agreement that because the child-care industry is governed by a network of very complex regulations, it would be difficult to focus on one or two specific issues for the Commission to address. However, the mid-year State reduction of \$2 million in SCDSS child-care funding brought to the Commission’s attention the special burdens that child care regulations and funding cuts have had on working poor families. This issue will be pursued in 2009

New TANF Regulations: A goal of the Commission in 2008 was to assess the impact of the 2006 federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) regulations on the Suffolk County Departments of Social Services and Labor. The Commission had prepared letters of concern on these regulations which were sent to the three Congressmen who serve Suffolk County and shared with the Suffolk County Legislature. In the spring of 2008, delegations from the Commission met with Congressman Steve Israel and Tim Bishop separately to discuss the burdens that the new TANF regulations place on Suffolk County. Each Congressman promised to take up these regulations after the presidential election of 2008. This issue will be pursued in 2009.

Employment Assessment: A related goal for the Commission in 2008 was to “work with SCDSS regarding intake assessment forms and procedures” in conjunction with the anticipated release of a new assessment tool by the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA). This tool was not released by OTDA in 2008. Nevertheless, the Commission’s Employment Assessment Committee had several constructive meetings with SCDSS officials which shed light on the process by which disabled clients are assessed as well as SCDSS procedures for avoiding sanctions. The Commission was pleased to learn of a significant reduction in sanctions that came about as a result of the SCDSS Sanctions Avoidance Project. Additionally, the Department agreed with the Commission’s recommendation to expand “holistic sanctioning” procedures so that a client’s complete record of compliance with Department regulations would be assessed prior to imposing a sanction. This procedure should further reduce sanctions by sparing clients who are generally in compliance from having a sanction imposed for one or two infractions. This issue will be pursued in 2009.

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The Commission meets monthly, always with a quorum, and has created several committees that also meet to pursue issues such as Child Care, Employment Assessment and Staffing. 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,

Richard Koubek, Ph.D., Chair, For Legislator Kate Browning
Kathy Liguori, 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
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