

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

Minutes of the February 23rd, 2009 Meeting

Present: Richard Koubek, Chair; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair; Linda O'Donohoe; Ellen Krakow; Gina Corporaso for Idania Aponte; Pam Killoran; Peter Barnett; Eric Lopez; Peggy Boyd; Don Friedman; Jack Caffey; Frank Casiglia for Kathy Malloy; Rob Greenberger

Excused: Nina Leonhardt; Gwen Branch; Judy Cahn; Jane Devine; Bridget DePasquale; Mike Stoltz; Ken Zone

Absent: Joan Grant

Guests: Legislator John Kennedy; Mary Weiler, St. Sylvester Outreach; Joan McGay, St. Joseph the Worker Outreach

1. **Minutes:** The minutes of the February 4th, 2009 meeting were approved unanimously without changes.
2. **Child Care:** Kathy Liguori reported that the state cuts in Child Care for SCDSS have caused 900 children in working poor families to be placed on a child-care waiting list. She noted that the federal stimulus funds to New York State will not likely lead to a restoration of the \$2 million cut in SCDSS child care funds that was made in the spring of 2008. She led a discussion of a child care low-interest loan program, similar to low-interest college loans, which could help working families secure subsidies, which they would pay back after their children leave child care and enter the public school system. There was much interest in further analysis of this proposal and it was agreed that the Child Care Committee should reconvene for this expressed purpose, and to discuss the possibility of the Commission holding a public hearing on child care for the working poor.
3. **Emergency Housing:** Kathy Liguori reported that a few of the families of children who attend her Tutor Time centers have had some problems with the SCDSS shelters where they reside. She raised questions about the supervision of SCDSS shelters and she asked if the Commission should take up emergency housing in its 2009 goals. Peter Barnett pointed out that since the County has a task force on homelessness that will soon be releasing its 10 year plan, the Commission should not replicate their work. It was agreed that the Commission should revisit the report on homelessness released in the last month of the Gaffney administration. Some of this report was incorporated into the Commission's 2007 report to the Legislature on affordable housing.
4. **New TANF Rules and Employment Assessment:** Don Friedman discussed several new proposed Public Assistance work rules that allow for greater flexibility in services provided to clients: unsupervised homework can count as work; in cases of a lack of basic literacy, pursuit of education and a GED must be encouraged; a 9th grade education is now defined as the basic literacy level. He noted that the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) has released an RFP to test a modified screening tool that will include an expanded mental health component. Counties will be selected to pilot this instrument. It was agreed that the Commission's Employment Assessment Committee should reconvene to begin an evaluation of the new screening tool.

5. **Commission Goals for 2009:** The Commission reviewed its 2008 goals, noting that each of the goals had been addressed with two of them having been successfully completed: updating the Commission’s membership; completing the Education and Training pilot. A full report to the Legislature on the Commission’s 2008 activities and its 2009 goals will be discussed and voted on at the March meeting. The Commission reached consensus that the work begun on following 2008 goals will be carried into 2009:
- a. Continue to monitor 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.
 - b. Continue to explore opening SCDSS centers one evening a week.
 - c. Continue to assess staffing levels at SCDSS and SCDOL, including the chronic pattern of unfilled, authorized SCDSS and SCDOL staff positions.
 - d. Continue to assess the Suffolk County Department of Social Services (SCDSS) and the Suffolk County Department of Labor (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.
 - e. 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.
6. **SCDSS Evening Hours:** Legislator John Kennedy joined the Commission for an extended discussion of IR 1019 and the County Executive’s evening hours plan. Linda O’Donohoe distributed data from the three centers that had evening hours thus far in February: South West; Coram and Smithtown. The data which show the number of clients served for the entire day at each center that had evening hours, along with the average number of clients served each day during the four weeks immediately before and/or after the day that the center had the evening hours, are summarized as follows:

	South West 2/4	Average*	Coram 2/11	Average*	Smithtown 2/18	Average*
Emergency needs	41	66	46	49	30	27
Food stamps	43	39	23	17	22	16
Eligibility Assistance	NA	NA	12	14	8	9

* Average daily services provided for the four weeks immediately before/after evening hours

- a. There was discussion of the data with differing interpretations as to what they revealed about evening hours. It was noted that services which normally are available to working poor people, such as Food Stamps, increased on the days that evening hours were available. But, the data did not show the number of people who may have been turned away in the mornings when the center was closed nor did they show the actual number of clients who came for evening hours. There was widespread agreement that more data need to be collected to assess the success of evening hours, especially in light of *Newsday* stories which may have confused the public by reporting several times that the SCDSS evening hours might be rescinded.

- b. Legislator Kennedy visited the SCDSS Smithtown Center in his district during the evening hours program and felt that it was successful in expanding services to the working poor. He reported that on February 20th he attended a meeting along with Legislator Kate Browning, Deputy County Executive Ben Zwirn and Chief Deputy SCDSS Commissioner Greg Blass to resolve differences between the County Executive and Legislature on SCDSS evening hours and that the discussions were constructive. It was suggested that the next meeting include a representative from Association of Municipal Employees union as well as from the Commission.
 - c. Legislator Kennedy noted that County Executive Levy's veto message contained a promising offer to pilot test full-day services along with evening hours. Commission Chair Richard Koubek, joined by a number of Commission members as well as guests Mary Weiler and Joan McGay (the latter two having brought evening hours to the attention of the Commission) expressed their hope that the Legislature and County Executive would resolve their differences so that a workable evening hours plan could go forward.
 - d. Legislator Kennedy concluded that he would not introduce a resolution to override the County Executive's veto of IR 1019 if he believes that the discussions with the Administration continue to be productive. He noted that if the veto of IR 1019 is overridden (thereby rescinding the County Executive's evening hours plan,), he may introduce another resolution directing SCDSS to propose an evening hours plan that includes full day services.
7. **SCDSS Staffing:** Richard Koubek reported that Legislator Browning was awaiting the monthly SCDSS staffing report from Gail Vizzini, Director of the Legislature's Budget Review Office.
8. **Ad Hoc Media Committee:** It was agreed that an Ad Hoc Media Committee be created to establish Commission protocols for dealing with the press. The Committee would likely meet once, via a telephone conference. Rob Greenberger, Kathy Liguori and Richard Koubek agreed to serve on the Committee. Absent Commission members would be invited to join as well.
9. **Tabled Issues:** The remainder of the agenda was tabled to the March meeting due to a lack of time.
10. **Next Meeting: Monday, March 30th, 2009, 9:30 AM at the SCDOL One Stop Center.**