

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

**Minutes of the May 8, 2009 Meeting**

**Present:** Richard Koubek, Chair; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair; Jack Caffey; Ellen Krakow; Roland Hampson for Linda O'Donohoe; Peggy Boyd; Rob Greenberger; Debra Alloncius for Kathy Malloy; Nina Leonhardt; Peter Barnett; Judy Cahn; Michael Stoltz; Gwen Branch; Bridget DePasquale; Pam Killoran; Liane Lewis for Ken Zone

**Excused:** Don Friedman; Joan Grant; Jane Devine

**Absent:** Eric Lopez; Idania Aponte

1. **Minutes:** The minutes of the April 15<sup>th</sup> meeting were approved unanimously on a motion by Jack Caffey, seconded by Kathy Liguori.
2. **Legislative Report on Staffing:** Richard Koubek and Peter Barnett described the April 23<sup>rd</sup> presentation on the Commission's SCDSS staff vacancies update report they made to the Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee. Both noted that the Committee was fully engaged in the discussion as were SCDSS Commissioner Janet DeMarzo, Deputy Commissioner Gregory Blass, other SCDSS staff, Deputy County Executive Ben Zwirn and legislative Budget Review Office Director Gail Vizzini.
  - a. Mr. Koubek and Mr. Barnett, along with Kathy Liguori, met for one hour prior to the Committee meeting with legislative Budget Review Office Director Gail Vizzini and BRO Senior Analyst Diane Dono to discuss staffing. They were told that the budgeted number of staff do not necessarily correspond to the level of filled staff positions that are funded. The County's Biweekly Payroll summarizes filled positions, not the total universe of budgeted positions which do not always have the funds necessary to fill them. The appropriations process is controlled by the County Executive, with vacancies filled depending on departmental needs and available funds. This practice of budgeting but not funding positions has been in existence for many years, with a consensus reached among legislators and county executives, that unfunded, budgeted positions should not be eliminated since restoring them, when needed, could be difficult. Mr. Koubek reminded the Commission that this pattern of unfunded vacancies was outlined in the Commission's 2008 report to the Legislature on SCDSS understaffing.
  - b. Mr. Barnett noted that he reiterated to the Committee that positions reimbursed at 100% should be immediately backfilled, as recommended in the Commission's 2008 report on understaffing at SCDSS. While the Commission had received a memo from SCDSS in September 2008 showing that Food Stamps and HEAP are 100% reimbursed, there seemed to be some concern that these reimbursement rates were either incorrect and/or had changed with the 2009 reimbursement rates imposed as a result of the state's fiscal crisis. Clarification will be sought.

- c. Mr. Koubek and Mr. Barnett reported that the Medicaid vacancies have not been filled because SCDSS has not had the office space to house them. This problem will soon be rectified since SCDSS has negotiated a contract with AIG to rent office space for the new Medicaid workers.
- d. SCDSS responded to the Commission's April 23<sup>rd</sup> staff vacancies update report to the Legislature in an April 24<sup>th</sup> Newsday story on SCDSS staffing by noting that staff vacancy reports are skewed and that the "overall ... level of staffing positions has increased... As of April 15 social services had 1,557 employees, up from 1,438 at the end of 2007." Mr. Koubek noted that this 8% increase in staff has not kept pace with the 14% increase in demand for SCDSS services reported by the Department.
- e. Chair Richard Koubek reported that he felt the logical next step in the Commission's on-going staffing analysis would be to request data from the Department as to the effects that staff vacancies may be having on the quality of services. He said that Health and Human Services Chair Kate Browning was willing to ask the Department for data on client/case worker ratios and application processing times which might show the impact of understaffing on Department operations. There ensued a lengthy discussion on whether the Commission should request this data, whether the staffing data alone would adequately reveal the quality of services when other factors such as increases in efficiency are not included, and how the data should be collected and interpreted. Some members of the Commission argued that the inquiry for staff performance data should be framed by the larger economic downturn currently hitting the County and the nation.
- f. The following motion was introduced by Michael Stoltz and seconded by Jack Caffey: The Welfare to Work Commission is interested in whether and how SCDSS and SCDOL are responding to the current economic downturn with regard to increased demands for services, current staffing levels and staff vacancies. Therefore, the Commission is requesting the following information for the SCDSS departments listed below, for the period March 2008 to March, 2009: (1) Client/case worker ratios; (2) Application processing times. The motion passed: Yes: 13; No: 0; Abstentions: 2 (Roland Hampson and Pam Killoran)
- g. The Commission then discussed the departments for which the staff-performance data would be requested. Using the latest BRO report on SCDSS trends in services, the Commission reached consensus that data on staff performance (client/case worker ratios and application processing times) should be requested for the following SCDSS departments:
  - i. Temporary Assistance (all categories: Family Assistance, Safety Net Families, Safety Net Singles, etc.)
  - ii. Child Protective Services and Adult Protective Services
  - iii. Child Care (not including provider reimbursements)
  - iv. Child Support Enforcement Bureau
  - v. Emergency Assistance (all categories)

### 3. SCDSS Evening Hours:

- a. Chair Richard Koubek shared with the Commission a SCDSS report on evening hours presented to the Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee on May 7<sup>th</sup>. The report showed disappointing numbers of working families availing themselves of the new hours (e.g., only "27 individuals presenting with emergencies, none of whom were working families.") The report did conclude that the Department plans "to continue the Evening Hours Pilot until February, 2010."
- b. Mr. Koubek noted that Commissioner Demarzo and Deputy Commissioner Blass told the legislative committee that they were very supportive of continuing the pilot and thought that the fall HEAP applications would demonstrate the need for evening hours for the working poor. They also supported creative ideas being generated by the Welfare to Work Commission to publicize evening hours in a way that appeals to and reaches working people who may not think of themselves as eligible for DSS services.
- c. Peggy Boyd, Chair of the Ad Hoc Evening Hours Committee, submitted a draft flyer created by the Committee (Rob Greenberger, Richard Koubek, Kathy Liguori, Joan McGay.) The draft is attached below. The Committee emphasized Emergency Assistance to Families (EAF) which they considered a major service that working families could access during evening hours. There was concern that EAF might raise false expectations of help for working people since the EAF regulations and application process are extremely complex and often lead to a denial of services because applicants do not meet income and other requirements.
- d. Roland Hampson announced that United Way of Long Island had received a major grant to expand Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) funds which are administered by not-for-profit agencies such as Catholic Charities, FECS and Family Service League. It was noted that EFSP funds are not supposed to be distributed to working people in emergencies until EAF funds have been denied by SCDSS, which is one of the main reasons that parish outreach coordinators requested evening hours in the first place.
- e. The Commission reviewed the state's Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) brochure, "Work Pays NY" and their palm card, "myBenefits.ny.gov" and there was consensus that this approach might be better than the draft flyer presented by the Ad Hoc Evening Hours Committee. It was agreed that permission would be sought from OTDA for SCDSS to use these resources to re-publicize evening hours. The Ad Hoc Committee will meet again in May to continue drafting the flyer. They will focus on HEAP and EAF services. Roland Hampson agreed to join the Committee.
- f. Peggy Boyd expressed disappointment at the low turnout of working people for the evening hours and questioned whether the need for these hours, presented in 2007 by parish outreach coordinators, was justified. Mr. Koubek and Bridget DePasquale responded that it is too early to judge the success of evening hours, especially since working people may never have learned of the new hours and the EAF program, which was at the heart of the coordinators' request for evening hours, is an extremely complex program. Mr. Koubek

noted that EAF is not prominently listed in an OTDA “My Benefits” handout on services available to the working poor. There is also on-going confusion about where and how EAF and EFSP interface.

4. **Employment Assessment Committee:** Chair Rob Greenberger reported that the Committee met on April 20<sup>th</sup> and agreed that Don Friedman would provide an update on TANF and state work regulations, comparing the current rules to those critiqued by the Commission in 2007-2008. Because Mr. Friedman was unable to attend the May 8<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting, his report was tabled until the June meeting.
5. **Child Care:** Kathy Liguori reported that the state’s additional \$5 million in funding for child care, along with the County’s increase of \$2 million for the current fiscal year, will enable SCDSS to subsidize child care for 750 children of working poor families currently on the waiting list. Ms. Liguori commended Commissioner DeMarzo and her staff for their leadership and cooperation in securing the restoration of these funds. She will soon reconvene the Child Care Committee of the Commission to discuss pro-active approaches to child care as well as the on-going difficulties faced by the working poor in securing subsidized child care, which continues to be under funded by the federal and state governments when compared with the need for these services.
6. **SCDSS Updates:** Roland Hampson reported on a number of very positive SCDSS program developments:
  - a. The additional \$5 million in state funds for child care.
  - b. An expanded school lunch program developed by SCDSS.
  - c. Additional funding for emergency assistance received by United Way of Long Island.
  - d. Additional funding of \$1.5 million for a SCDSS housing initiative. He asked that Assistant Deputy County Commissioner Ed Hernandez be provided time to explain this new program to the Commission.
7. **Medicaid Independent Living Initiative:** Rob Greenberger reported that the New York State Department of Health has implemented a Nursing Home Transition and Diversion (NHTD) Medicaid Waiver which will allow frail senior citizens to receive assistance at home rather than in nursing homes. He noted that this program will free up Medicaid nursing home funds for use in community Medicaid services. He asked that the Suffolk Independent Living Organization (SILO) be given an opportunity to provide a brief overview of the program at the June Commission meeting.
8. **Commission Membership in HWC-LI and SCC:** This issue was again tabled due to lack of time.
9. **Next Meeting:** Friday, June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009, 9:30 AM, at SCDSS-DOL

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***If your family has experienced a sudden financial crisis, the Suffolk County Department of Social Services may be able to help:***

**Did you know...**

**Suffolk County's Department of Social Services may be able to provide Emergency Assistance to help you pay for:**

- **One month's mortgage or rent if you are in arrears**
- **One month's utilities if you are in arrears**
- **Emergency expenses that prevent you from paying your mortgage or rent, such as;**
  - **Car repairs**
  - **Car insurance**
  - **Medical bills**

The Suffolk County Department of Social Services staff are available to help you through this crisis. They will help you determine eligibility for benefits and facilitate your application process.

Additional, program information can be obtained at [www.MyBenefits.ny.gov](http://www.MyBenefits.ny.gov) Suffolk County Department of Social Services centers hours and locations:

**Deer Park**

**South West Center**

**2 South 2<sup>nd</sup> Street**

**Hours:**

**Coram**

**80 Middle Country Road**

**Coram, New York 11727**

**Hours:**

**Smithtown**

**200 Wireless Boulevard**

**Hauppauge, New York 11788**

**Hours:**

**Riverhead**

**893 E. Main Street**

**Riverhead, New York 11901**

**Hours:**