

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

Minutes of the June 12th, 2009 Meeting

Present: Richard Koubek, Chair; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair; Legislator Kate Browning; Jack Caffey; Sheila Johnson for Ellen Krakow; Dr. Edward Hernandez for Roland Hampson; Peggy Boyd; Rob Greenberger; Kathy Malloy; Nina Leonhardt; Peter Barnett; Judy Cahn; Michael Stoltz; Bridget DePasquale; Don Friedman ;Ken Zone; Jane Devine; Eric Lopez

Excused: Joan Grant; Gwen Branch; Pam Killoran

Absent: Idania Aponte

Guests: Kathy Ayers Lanzillata, Director of Catholic Charities Chemical Dependence Programs; Bonnie Hope and Joan Barbieri, SILO; John Hughes, aide to Leg. Browning; Alyssa Sclarsh, Empire Justice Center

1. **Minutes:** The minutes of the May 8th meeting were accepted unanimously, without changes, on a motion by Jack Caffey, seconded by Rob Greenberger.
2. **Nursing Home Transition and Diversion Program:** Rob Greenberger introduced Bonnie Hope and Joan Barbieri from Suffolk Independent Living Organization (SILO) who provided an overview of the new State Nursing Home Transition and Diversion program. SILO has a contract with the NYS Dept of Health to administer the NHTD Waiver Program for Nassau and Suffolk Counties. This is a statewide program of which Long Island is one of nine regions. This program allows for the waiver of services not typically covered by Medicaid so that Medicaid will provide these services to seniors and people with physical disabilities who choose to remain in their homes rather than be placed in institutional nursing homes. Some people are transitioned out of nursing facilities. Rob Greenberger noted that the estimated cost of keeping frail seniors/disabilities in their homes could be about one third less than placing them in an institutional setting which typically can cost \$100,000 a year. Richard Koubek noted that this program could potentially save millions of dollars now spent on institutional care (about 80 percent of the Medicaid budget) which could be used for Medicaid community-based services to poor people. For people that are eligible and are capable of remaining in their homes, the program provides supports such as: service coordination; assistive technology; community integration counseling; community transitional services; congregate and home delivered meals; environmental modification services; home visits by Medicaid personnel; independent living skills training; moving assistance; nutritional counseling/educational services; peer mentoring; positive behavioral interventions and supports; respiratory therapy; respite services for caregivers; structural day programs; wellness counseling. While there was much enthusiasm for this program, some members of the Commission, had caveats. Peggy Boyd was concerned that seniors who choose to live in a nursing home should not be forced to remain in their

homes. The SILO representatives gave assurances that no one would be forced into the program, and they discussed a specific constituent situation raised by Legislator Browning.

1. **Homeless Prevention Rapid Rehousing Program (HPRHP):** Dr. Edward Hernandez, SCDSS Deputy Commissioner, provided a presentation on HPRHP. This program was created by the State, using federal stimulus funds, to provide emergency, not long term, housing assistance to people at risk of or already homeless. The federal government requires that these funds be distributed by September 30th, 2009. The funds are being targeted by SCDSS to three geographic areas in Suffolk that qualified, based on their need for emergency housing assistance. The funds will be distributed to private agencies that are awarded contracts. SCDSS will host an applicants' conference on June 22nd. RFAs must be submitted by July 15th; the awardees will be announced by SCDSS on August 14th. The funds must be given to a third party, not directly to the client, for: (1) rental assistance up to three months, perhaps as many as 18 months; (2) security payments; (3) utilities arrears up to six months; (4) moving, motel, housing search and legal fees. Section 8 recipients do not qualify for HPRHP funds. Richard Koubek noted that these funds appeared similar to the SCDSS administered Emergency Aid to Families (EAF) and to the privately administered United Way's Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) funds. Dr. Hernandez acknowledged the similarity and noted that the federal government has supplemented these existing programs through stimulus funds due to the current economic crisis. Richard Koubek noted that HPRHP could impact the number of people seeking help during SCDSS evening hours who would come in with a potential EAF housing emergency and then be referred to an HPRHP agency. Several Commission members had concerns:
 - a. Peter Barnett asked why these funds were not simply channeled through the United Way's EFSP board and approved EFSP agencies, thereby sparing the need to go through a separate RFA assessment process. Dr. Hernandez said that SCDSS felt the separate assessment process would work best.
 - b. Legislator Browning expressed concern that the HPRHP funds go directly to assist people in need and not be excessively used for administrative costs.
2. **SCDSS Evening Hours Flyer:** Peggy Boyd, Chair of the Ad Hoc Evening Hours Committee, reported that the Committee met on May 20 to adapt the State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) "Work Pays" flyer for the purpose of re-publicizing SCDSS evening hours. The Committee consists of Rob Greenberger, Bridget DePasquale, Richard Koubek and Joan McGay. Richard Koubek announced that Roland Hampson secured permission from OTDA for the adaptation and that Edward Carr, Government Relations Director for National Grid said that his company, and possibly LIPA as well, might be interested in distributing the flyer in their Suffolk bills. Ms. Boyd distributed two mockups of the flyer. She noted how the flyer uses language that appeals to working people and identifies SCDSS services that could assist them. It also identifies the new hours at the SCDSS centers. There was some discussion of the mockups, with the Commission favoring one that had clearer language. The Committee will meet again on June 25th to finalize the flyer.
3. **Sober Homes Legislation:** Legislator Browning discussed the problem in her district, and elsewhere on Long Island, of unregulated sober homes. These facilities

house people who claim to be in alcohol/chemical-dependence recovery, some of whom attend treatment services. But because the State does not have clear regulations governing their operations nor any system for monitoring them, many sober homes are run by unscrupulous landlords who pack too many people into the homes without providing the necessary rehabilitation services or even basics such as food. These landlords thus stand to make enormous profits since the State reimburses them from \$309 (room only) to \$450 (room and board) a month for each resident. Legislator Browning noted that her district, which has many more low-cost properties than most legislative districts, has a very high concentration of sober homes that are the source of continuous complaints from neighbors and civic organizations. She noted that five years ago Governor George Pataki vetoed legislation to regulate sober homes because the State Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) argued that they were better positioned than the proposed legislation to address the needs of individuals in treatment who live in sober homes. Legislator Browning stated that five years later she still has not seen regulations for sober homes and the problems still persist.

- a. Because County regulation of sober homes requires “home rule” legislation from the State, Legislator Browning reported that she visited State legislators in Albany, along with SCDSS Commissioner Janet Demarzo and County Executive Steve Levy, to support two bills to help establish regulations for sober homes: (1) a bill requiring sober home operators who house public assistance clients to comply with local Town codes; (2) a bill requiring that the rents they charge not exceed 20 percent of the fair market rental. These bills had been adopted as Suffolk County resolutions by the County Legislature, but OTDA ruled that such regulations must be adopted by the State Legislature, not a county legislature. Both bills are currently in the State Legislature, and she asked the members of the Commission to support them.
- b. There ensued an extensive discussion of sober homes regulations and the proposed bills.
 - i. Kathy Ayers Lanzillata, Director for Alcohol and Chemical Dependency Programs at Catholic Charities, and a member of the Suffolk County Quality Consortium of provider agencies, reported that she co-chairs an OASAS Residential Treatment and Recovery Homes Workgroup (along with chief counsel to the OASAS Commissioner) that is charged with addressing the needs of individuals living in community residences such as sober homes. She stated that there are industry and State standards for operating effective community residences, including sober homes, and that some sober homes providers adhere to these guidelines. She also noted that the problems Legislator Browning described are widespread and that the OASAS Workgroup is attempting to address them. Richard Koubek invited Ms. Ayers to meet with him, Kathy Liguori and Legislator Browning so that we can learn in detail what the Task Force is working to accomplish. Ms. Ayers agreed, and offered to bring other providers to the meeting who are also struggling with the sober homes issue.

- ii. Peggy Boyd and Michael Stoltz spoke of the need to address the problems of mentally-ill people, including those who are alcohol/chemically dependent, with care and concern, making sure that they receive services in a “least-restrictive” environment. They were concerned that local and State legislation might create unnecessary restrictions on the delivery of services to this fragile population. Legislator Browning and other Commission members expressed dismay that the State has not yet established clear regulations to prevent unscrupulous sober home operators from abusing and neglecting their clients.
 - iii. Richard Koubek asked that Legislator Browning’s office provide him with electronic copies of the proposed State bills and an advocacy letter that he would circulate to Commission members for their agencies to sign on to, if they are so inclined.
- 4. **SCDSS Staffing:** Jack Caffey distributed copies of the latest SCDSS staffing reports. Richard Koubek noted that he and Kathy Liguori will be meeting with SCDSS officials and Legislator Browning to discuss the Commission’s request for additional staffing data related to the quality of SCDSS services. The staffing issue was tabled to the July meeting.
- 5. **Employment Assessment Committee:** Due to a lack of time, Don Friedman’s report on TANF work rules was tabled to the July meeting.
- 6. **Child Care:** Tabled
- 7. **Commission membership in HWC-LI and SCC:** Tabled.
- 8. **Next meeting: Friday, July 10, 2009, 9:30 AM, SCDOL One Stop Center.**