

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

Minutes of the July 29, 2008 Meeting

Present: Richard Koubek, Chair; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair; Legislator Kate Browning; Ellen Krakow; Peggy Boyd; Sondra Bachety; Nina Leonhardt; Judy Cahn; Idania Aponte; Frederick Combs for Joan Grant; James Andrews; Kathy Malloy; Michael Stoltz; Peter Barnett, Christine Brown for Ken Zone

Excused: Rob Greenberger; Gwen Branch; Don Friedman; Linda O'Donohoe; Jack Caffey

Guests: Erica Chase, Smart Government for Strong Families; Danielle Kane and Louis D'Amarino for Legislator John Kennedy

1. **Minutes:** The minutes of the June meeting were adopted unanimously, with minor corrections, on a motion by James Andrews, seconded by Judy Cahn.
2. **Attendance:** Richard Koubek announced that if Commission members are to be in compliance with new attendance regulations adopted by the Legislature in IR 1230-2008, they must notify the Chair if they will be absent from a meeting. Their names are then recorded in the minutes of that meeting as "excused" and, in accordance with the Legislature's attendance requirements, their excused absences are accepted in the vote to adopt the minutes of that meeting.
3. **Commission Membership:** Richard Koubek announced that IR 1497-2008 "Amending Membership of the Suffolk County Welfare to Work Commission" was voted out of Committee unanimously by the Health and Human Services Committee on June 19th and adopted unanimously by the full Legislature on June 24th. County Executive Steve Levy signed the Resolution which makes these changes in the Commission's membership:
 - a. Delete a high school teacher to be selected by the Suffolk County School Superintendents' Association
 - b. Add:
 - i. A representative of the Suffolk County Association of Municipal Employees (SCAME)
 - ii. A representative of the Empire Justice Center (Long Island Office)
 - iii. A representative of the Family Service League
 - iv. A representative of the Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corporation (WHPDC)
 - c. Kathy Malloy (SCAME,) Don Friedman (Empire Justice Center,) Peggy Boyd (Family Service League) and Peter Barnett (WHPDC) were congratulated on their agency's new seats.
 - d. James Andrews announced that he has been appointed to a new position at SCDOL and will no longer serve on the Commission. His replacement has not yet been named by the Commissioner. Chair Richard Koubek and several members of the Commission thanked Mr. Andrews for his service.

4. *Smart Government for Strong Families Presentation on County Contracts:*

Richard Koubek introduced Erica Chase, Director of the Smart Government for Strong Families(SGSF) Coalition, a project of the Health and Welfare Council of Long Island, to make a presentation on the Coalition's efforts to improve contractual procedures and policies between Suffolk County and Not-for-Profit (NPF) contract agencies. Mr. Koubek pointed out that the issue of delayed contract approvals and payments negatively affects the NFPs which serve clients who have left welfare for work. Ms. Chase distributed a copy of the SGSF report, *Honoring the Contract*, to each member of the Commission. Some of the core points made by Ms. Chase were:

- a. The SGSF Coalition has 75 member agencies that together receive \$58 million annually in Suffolk County social-service contracts which serve poor and vulnerable people. Some of these contracts can take up to four months into the contract year before the County Executive's office grants formal approval, causing some NFPs to have to secure loans (with non-reimbursable interest charges) to meet their payroll.
- b. Ms. Chase pointed out that contracts are generally approved in a timely manner by the Legislature and that the delays in contractual approvals are due to systemic problems in the Executive branch, not necessarily tied to individual departments, which include:
 - i. Lack of adequate staff to process the contracts.
 - ii. Inadequate time frames for approvals. The process now begins immediately after the Legislature adopts the County budget in November thereby allowing only about 30 days to review each contract prior to the beginning of the new fiscal year. Ideally, she noted, the process should begin in the summer, with agencies submitting their budgets, narratives and required documents to the respective contracting department by October 1st, and with a contract approval deadline of December prior to the start date of services, typically on January 1st.
 - iii. Lack of multi-year contracts thereby requiring annual renewals that clog the approval process.
 - iv. Lack of uniform contract approval procedures for the entire County.
 - v. Failure to expedite the approval process by sufficiently using electronic forms and eliminating duplicative or unnecessary forms.
- c. Ms. Chase stated that the County Executive has argued that delays in contract approvals are due primarily to carefully scrutinizing each contract to avoid corruption and waste.
- d. Ms. Chase also pointed out that cumbersome County procedures and lack of staffing slow down payments to contract agencies. Ideally, an agency should receive payment within 30 days of a voucher being submitted. Currently, some agencies wait 45-90 days for payment.
- e. An extensive discussion of the SGSF report ensued with Ms. Chase pointing out that the Coalition has made legislative presentations and is working with the County Executive to implement its recommendations. SGSF is also considering working with the County Charter Revision Commission to make changes the Charter that would expedite both the contract approval and

contract reimbursement policies and procedures which will ultimately save the County as well as NFPs time and money.

- 5. SCAME Staffing Report:** Richard Koubek next introduced Kathy Malloy of SCAME for a presentation on their report, “Review and Analysis of Suffolk County’s 2008 Budget” produced by Abrams, Herde and Merkel, Certified Public Accountants. Again, Mr. Koubek pointed out that the Commission has had serious concerns regarding under-staffing at both SCDSS and SCDOL which appears to impede implementation of even incremental changes such as the Commission’s Education and Mentoring Pilot or its suggestion that evening hours be explored for SCDSS.
- a. Ms. Malloy said that SCDSS has a vacancy rate for authorized positions of 10.9% and that there is a Countywide vacancy rate of 12.4%. Regarding SCDSS staff vacancies, she made these points:
 - i. The vacancy rate persists despite increased demand for services (e.g., Medicaid caseloads have increased by over 50% in the past five years,) thereby causing enormous frustration among the workers she represents (understaffing is their number one complaint) as well as errors in processing applications and providing services, delays in reimbursements to contracted agencies and/or losses of State and Federal funds and significant County overtime costs.
 - ii. Historically, staff vacancy rates are used by County Executives to bolster the County surplus since delaying the hiring of authorized staff for six to nine months into a budget year can save millions of turnover-savings dollars in salaries and benefits. There is a sense that this practice is on the increase. Over the pasts several years, staff vacancies have resulted in nearly \$20 million annually in turnover savings that contribute to the County surplus. The 2008 budget is predicated on a total turnover savings of almost \$63 million.
 - iii. The budget adopted by the Legislature in November usually has an inflated count of “authorized” staff positions that includes unfilled and funded positions (“true vacancies”) and unfilled and unfunded positions (“phantom” positions.) Many unfilled and funded positions are simply not filled, or there are extensive delays (eight to ten months) in their being filled.
 - iv. Another problem related to under-staffing is the slow approval process for SCINs (Form 167) that authorize a specific hire. It can take over two months for the County Executive to approve each SCIN.
 - b. There ensued an extensive discussion of the AME report. Several members of the Commission asked if the Legislature is aware of these anticipated vacancies when they adopt the budget in November. Legislator Kate Browning pointed out that the budget process is very complex and often rushed in a six-week budget-approval period. Legislator Browning noted that the County is currently facing a \$130 million deficit and that closing it without raising taxes will be a difficult fiscal and political challenge. She suggested that the Commission meet with Gail Vizzini, Director of the Legislature’s Budget Review Office.

- c. A motion was made by Kathy Liguori, seconded by Michael Stoltz, to invite Gail Vizzini to address the Commission on the topic of understaffing, and the AME report, at the August meeting. Vote: 11 Yes; 0 No; 2 Abstentions (James Andrews and Nina Leonhardt.)
6. **SCDSS Extended Hours:** Richard Koubek reported that the Commission's recommendation of "Option C" continues to be discussed by legislators. Option C, proposed in SCDSS Commissioner Janet DeMarzo's May, 2008 report on extended hours, would create a centralized working families call-in center one evening a week staffed by two case managers on voluntary overtime at an annual cost of \$98,000.
 - a. Mr. Koubek noted that MICAHA (Mobilized Interfaith Coalition Against Hunger,) an interfaith, Long Island anti-poverty campaign, several of whose members brought the issue of extended hours before the Commission, continues to advocate for Option C. They are meeting with legislative members of the Health and Human Services Committee and have thus far seen Chair Kate Browning and Legislator John Kennedy. Meetings will be scheduled with Legislators Jack Eddington, Wayne Horsley and whoever is elected to replace Legislator Elie Mystal. Mr. Koubek has been part of this advocacy effort as a member of the MICAHA Steering Committee, not as Chair of the Commission.
 - b. As of June 30th, Legislator Kennedy was still awaiting Commissioner DeMarzo's response to his request for the actual cost of Option C, after State and Federal reimbursements are factored into the \$98,000 annual cost projected by the Commissioner. It has been estimated that the annual County cost for Option C could be as low as \$40,000-\$60,000 after reimbursements. Legislator Kennedy expressed interest in sponsoring a resolution to make Option C, the working families-call in center, a pilot program.
 - c. Kathy Malloy reiterated her union's concern about the relationship between understaffing at SCDSS and the issue of evening hours. Richard Koubek said that her concerns would be revisited if the MICAHA advocates are able to secure a resolution for an Option C pilot. Ms. Malloy is also concerned that case managers could be pressured into working overtime which would create a burdensome 10 hour day for them.
7. **Education Mentoring Pilot:** Nina Leonhardt reported that the 2008 pilot is underway. To date, five clients are enrolled (compared with about 25 at the beginning of the 2007 pilot) but, with Continuous Enrollment, more clients are expected to be enrolled each week.
8. **Child Care:** Child Care Committee Co-Chairs Kathy Liguori and Peggy Boyd reported that the Committee had not agreed on a pilot since the County is in deficit and the more immediate concern is the loss of \$2 million in State child-care funds for working poor parents for 2008. They also reported that Janet Walerstein of the Child Care Council of Suffolk met with the Committee at its meeting on the morning of July 29th and stated that Suffolk was being penalized for carrying a surplus. Ms. Walerstein contends that SCDSS Commissioner Janet DeMarzo anticipated an increase in demand for services and a decrease in State and Federal child care funding for 2008 and thereafter, and was reserving funds to meet these contingencies. Kathy Liguori announced that providers were meeting with the Commissioner on the

evening of July 29th to discuss the \$2 million cuts and that providers need to organize an advocacy campaign to oppose these cuts.

- 9. Employment Assessment Committee:** Richard Koubek announced that Committee Chair Rob Greenberger could not attend today's meeting but that he is in the process of scheduling a meeting with Kim Staab and other SCDSS staff to discuss holistic assessments of clients prior to issuing a sanction.
- 10. Next meeting: Wednesday, August 27th, 10 AM in Conference Room A of the SCDOL One Stop Center.**