

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

Minutes of the September 24, 2008 Meeting

Present: Richard Koubek, Chair; Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair, Jack Caffey, Bridget DePasquale; Ellen Krakow; Judy Cahn; Linda O'Donohoe; Rob Greenberger; Eric Lopez; Kathy Malloy; Peter Barnett; Pam Killoran; Nina Leonhardt; Gwendolyn Branch

Excused: Peggy Boyd; Sondra Bachety; Ken Zone; Michael Stoltz; Don Friedman; Joan Grant; Idania Aponte

Guests: Roland Hampson, SCDSS; Frank Casiglia; CSEB/AME

1. **Minutes:** The minutes of the August 27th meeting were unanimously approved, with corrections, on a motion by Kathy Malloy, seconded by Linda O'Donohoe.
2. **Employment Assessment Committee:**
 - a. Chair Rob Greenberger distributed an e-mail response from Kim Staab of SCDSS on questions raised by the Committee about assessment policies at SCDSS. He reported that Ms. Staab had given serious attention to the Committee's questions, especially the suggestion that a client be holistically assessed before a sanction is imposed, with an effort made not to sanction those clients generally in compliance. This request arose in a January 2008 meeting between Commission members and SCDOL and SCDSS staff at which Professor Vicki Lens of Columbia University reported on a study she did of SCDSS sanctioned clients which revealed that "highly motivated" clients were being unnecessarily sanctioned. Linda O'Donohoe corroborated the fact that holistic sanctioning is now underway, with every effort being made to avoid sanctions. Mr. Greenberger expressed his gratitude to SCDSS for following through on this issue.
 - b. Ellen Krakow noted that her agency, Nassau/Suffolk Law Services, continues to see disabled clients who are in DCAP and therefore applying for SSI being unnecessarily sanctioned because they have been assigned to a work experience for which they should have been exempted. Roland Hampson noted that there sometimes are disputes regarding claims of mental disability by clients and that some clients inappropriately claim to have disabilities and apply for SSI. Ms. Krakow will supply a list of disabled clients her agency believes were unnecessarily sanctioned to SCDSS and the issue of SSI applicants being sanctioned will be pursued by the Employment Assessment Committee.
3. **Ad Hoc SCDSS Staffing Committee:** Richard Koubek reported that the Commission has been frustrated over the past several years by the difficulties encountered in implementing two incremental policy changes – the Education Case Management/Mentoring Pilot and the concept of evening hours at SCDSS – because of understaffing at SCDSS and SCDOL. These concerns led to an examination of staffing at the July and August meetings of the Commission, including reports on

staffing from SCAME and Gail Vizzini, Director of the Legislative Budget Review Office. The Commission then formed an Ad Hoc Staffing Committee which met on September 12th and again on September 22nd. The Committee agreed to pursue a report on understaffing to the Legislature during the October budget hearings. Mr. Koubek distributed an outline of the report which the Committee is proposing. The goal of the report is to call the legislators' attention to understaffing at SCDSS which is built into the budget they adopt each November. (Draft report outline below)

- a. Linda O'Donohoe and Roland Hampson distributed and explained charts showing patterns of requests for services and services provided at SCDSS, 2001-2008, in Medicare, Child Protective Services, Client Benefits, Child Care and Housing. Generally, the data showed an increase in the demand for services.
- b. It was noted that the report lacked data on Child Support, federal and State revenues lost due to staff vacancies and staff/client ratios, which Mr. Hampson said he would attempt to get for the Ad Hoc Staffing Committee. Commission Chair Richard Koubek and other members thanked Mr. Hampson and Ms O'Donohoe for the excellent data summaries.
- c. Linda O'Donohoe and Roland Hampson also distributed a summary of new hires at SCDSS, effective September 19, 2008, showing that 35 of 77 vacancies had been filled, bringing the SCDSS staffing rate to 95%. Several Commission members noted that these fall hires are common and do not reflect the 8% to 9% SCDSS staff vacancies that exist from January through September of each year.
- d. Peter Barnett again pointed out that the failure to fill vacant positions which are reimbursed with federal and State funds costs the County millions of dollars each year in both the lost reimbursement funds and the tax revenues these funds could generate for the County. He pointed out that this is a pointless loss of revenues, especially when positions such as Food Stamps, Medicaid and HEAP salaries are 100% reimbursed.
- e. There was extensive discussion as to why the County Executive's office can take up to two months to sign off on SCIN forms authorizing the filling of SCDSS staff vacancies. It is understood that the County Executive's office has final control of the SCIN approval process under the current County Charter. Kathy Liguori reminded the Commission that the Prompt Payment Bill was enacted in part because the County Comptroller's report on lags in SCDSS child-care payments found a pattern of understaffing in the SCDSS Payment Unit of the SCDSS Accounting Office.
- f. Richard Koubek announced that he and Kathy Liguori were invited to meet with Deputy County Executive Jim Morgo, and Deputy SCDSS Commissioner Greg Blass, on September 30th, to discuss the Commission's proposed staffing report.
- g. There next ensued an extended discussion of the Ad Hoc Committee's draft report outline (see below) on understaffing and the Commission achieved unanimous consensus that the Ad Hoc Committee should meet again to draft a report which will be submitted to the full Commission for approval at the October meeting. Health and Human Services Committee Chair Kate

Browning has indicated that she will try to arrange a place on the agenda of the October 20th budget hearing for the Commission to deliver its report on understaffing at SCDSS.

4. **Child Care Committee:** Co-chair Kathy Liguori reported that a coalition of child care providers has secured a public meeting with administrators from the New York State Office of Family and Children's Services to discuss the loss of \$2.2 million in SCDSS child care funds as part of the Governor's 2008 deficit-reduction plan. That meeting will take place on October 17th, 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM in the Media Room of the Dennison Building. Commission members were asked to publicize the meeting to their agencies. SCDSS will also publicize the meeting.
5. **Education Pilot:** Nina Leonhardt and Judy Cahn reported that data from the 2008 pilot is not yet completed. The Case Management/Mentoring position is now included in the Suffolk County Community College 2009 budget.
6. **SCDSS Evening Hours:** It was reported that Legislators John Kennedy and Duwayne Gregory introduced a resolution on September 16th regarding SCDSS evening hours. Most Commission members have not yet seen the resolution, which the Commission will take up at the October meeting.
7. **Next meeting: Wednesday, October 15th, 9:30 AM at SCDOL.**

Proposed Outline for a Welfare to Work Commission Report on SCDSS Staffing

1. **Purpose:** To provide a Commission report to the Legislature, during the 2009 County budget approval process, that:
 - a. Summarizes the staffing analyses in reports submitted by the Legislature's Budget Review Office (BRO) and SCAME
 - b. Surveys past impacts of understaffing on the quality of services and loss of reimbursement revenues
 - c. Recommends Legislative action on staffing in the 2009 budget
2. **Evidence of increases in demand for services**
 - a. E.g., 2008 AME Report:
 - i. 50% increase in Medicaid caseloads over the past 5 years;
 - ii. 75% increase in child support cases
 - b. Increases in applications
 - c. Increases in caseloads
 - d. Increases in caseworker/client ratios (TBD)
 - e. Other?
3. **Evidence of understaffing.**
 - a. BRO 2009 report (TBD)
 - b. AME 2009 report (TBD)
4. **Case study of the impact of understaffing**

- a. 2007 Comptroller's report on SCDSS Payment Procedures
- 5. Examples of negative impact on services**
- a. AME 2009 report (TBD)
 - b. Survey of not-for-profit Commission members (TBD)
 - c. Wider survey to the not-for-profit community (TBD)
- 6. Examples of loss of reimbursement revenues due to understaffing (TBD)**
- 7. Recommendations (TBD)**