

**COUNTY OF SUFFOLK**



**WELFARE TO WORK COMMISSION  
of the Suffolk County Legislature  
c/o Clerk of the Legislature  
725 Veterans Memorial Highway  
Smithtown NY 11787**

**Richard Koubek, Ph.D., Chair  
Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair**

**ACTIVITIES OF  
THE WELFARE TO WORK COMMISSION  
OF THE SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE  
June 2003-May, 2008**

The Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature was established in 2003 to provide recommendations and information to the Suffolk County Legislature that assist the County to effectively transition to the new federal and State welfare reform requirements. Below is a report on the Commission's 2008 objectives as well as its activities, January 2007 through May, 2008, as required by R 181-2003.

**Commission Goals for 2008**

- Update the Commission's membership as provided in IR 1497-2008 introduced in June, 2008 by Legislator Vivian Vioria Fisher and Presiding Officer William Lindsay.
- Continue to monitor implementation of the Commission's Education and Training Pilot Program in its second year, evaluate its outcomes and make follow-up recommendations, where appropriate, to the Suffolk County Legislature for action in the 2009 County budget.
- 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 negative effects of the 2006 federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) regulatory changes on that program and, where appropriate, make recommendations to each department and to the Suffolk County Legislature and to the Suffolk County congressional delegation.
- 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.

- Continue to assess the possibility of opening SCDSS one evening a week at a centrally-located working families call-in center.
- Continue to monitor SCDSS reimbursements to child care providers and focus on the quality, availability and affordability of child care for clients on Public Assistance as well as working poor families, with the possibility of creating a pilot program that addresses these concerns.
- Assess staffing levels at SCDSS and SDOL, including what appears to be a chronic pattern of 11% to 13% of unfilled, authorized SCDSS staff positions, given the close relationship between the Commission's 2008 goals and the need for full staffing at these two departments.

### Commission Activities, 2003-May, 2008

#### 1. Education and Training:

- a. **Case Management/Mentoring Pilot:** The Commission's Education and Training Committee recommended and the Commission proposed to the Legislature in August 2006 a **\$29,500 pilot program, which was adopted in the 2007 County Omnibus budget by the Legislature, that would case manage and mentor a selected group of at-risk SCDSS clients through education and training programs.** The pilot's primary objectives were to:
  - Continue to refine assessment tools in order to identify at-risk clients;
  - Identify barriers that cause at-risk clients to drop out of education and training;
  - Create a structured case management/mentoring program to help at-risk clients overcome the barriers that cause them to leave education and training programs.
  - **Pilot Results, 2007: The results of the pilot were quite promising, with the dropout rate among the cohort enrolled in the pilot falling from a non-pilot level of 25% to 10 % for pilot participants.**
  - **2008 Pilot Activities. As a result of pilot's success in 2007, the Legislature funded the pilot for a second year in the 2008 Omnibus budget. The 2008 pilot will begin in July.**
- b. **College Enrollment:** The Commission reviewed the 2008-2009 SCDSS biennial Employment Plan and **recommended that welfare clients be permitted to enroll in a two year college program in the first or second year of study. The Commissioner agreed to this request, which is now SCDSS policy.**
- c. **Revision of SCDOL Employment Assessment Procedures:** During 2006-2007, members of the Commission's Education and Training Committee met with representatives of the Suffolk County Department of Labor (SCDOL) to improve the employment assessment process. Several of the State mandated interview procedures were adapted and revised so that clients could be asked more probing questions regarding their desire to pursue education and training.

#### 2. Affordable Housing Report:

- a. Responding to a concern expressed by SCDSS Commissioner Janet DeMarzo who met with the Commission in May of 2006, two public hearings were held in

- November, 2006 on the severe shortage of affordable housing in Suffolk County for people earning under 80% of the LI median income.
- b. Testimony from 47 witnesses at the public hearings was used to write a report to the Legislature, *Affordable For Whom? Creating Housing for Low and Moderate Income People in Suffolk County* that contains 15 specific recommendations for action. The report was released in February, 2007 and the recommendations were presented to the Legislature's Economic Development, Labor and Workforce Housing Committee and Health and Human Services Committee in February and March, 2007.
  - c. *Newsday* carried a third-page story on the report and published an editorial supporting its recommendation for a County housing needs study. Members of the Commission also met with Michael White, Director of the Long Island Regional Planning Board to discuss the report's recommendations.
  - d. The Regional Planning Board released its own 25 point plan in June, 2007, which included a number of the same recommendations made by the Commission.

3. **Employability Assessment:**

In 2007, the Commission formed a SCDSS Employability Assessment Committee to review current policies and practices related to the intake employability assessment of clients at SCDSS. Among the issues the Committee has taken up are:

- a. The effectiveness of the mental health and chemical dependency portions of the current SCDSS employability assessment tool.
- b. The draft New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) assessment tool.
- c. The relationship between current SCDSS employability assessment tools and practices to the requirements in the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA.)
- d. Possible relationships between current assessment tools and practices and the number of welfare clients who are sanctioned.
- e. The possibility of conducting a holistic assessment of a client's overall case before imposing a sanction. Using computer case files, case workers would thus determine if a client has a pattern of infractions before imposing a sanction.
- f. **2008 Activities: Having met twice with SCDSS staff in 2008, the Committee is awaiting release of the new OTDA assessment tool to assess its possible impact on SCDSS. Additionally, the Committee will pursue holistic assessment of clients in another meeting with SCDSS staff.**

4. **Assessment of TANF Regulations:**

- a. In conjunction with the Commission's work on SCDSS and SCDOL assessment procedures, the Commission analyzed the new welfare to work regulations created by the US Department of Health and Human Services that created very narrow definitions of acceptable work activities and significantly increased the work participation requirements for SCDSS and SCDOL.
- b. **In June, 2007, the Commission prepared a letter of concern to Congressmen Tim Bishop, Peter King and Steve Israel as well as to Senators Charles Schumer and Hillary Clinton, outlining the punitive nature of these regulations and recommending changes in the regulations.** This letter was shared with each member of the Suffolk County Legislature.

- c. **2008 Activities:** On February 5<sup>th</sup> and April 18<sup>th</sup> respectively, Commission members have met with Congressmen Bishop and Israel to explain the burdens placed on SCDSS and SCDOL by the new TANF regulations. Each Congressman promised to take up the TANF regulations in 2009. Congressman Israel will pass the Commission's concerns on to Congressman Charles Rangle, Chair of the House Ways and Means Committee.

5. **Child Care Issues:**

- a. The Commission's Child Care Committee met with SCDSS administrators in January, 2007 to discuss remedies for delays in child-care provider reimbursements. At that time, the Child Care Committee was informed that additional SCDSS staff would be hired, and changes in procedures implemented, to expedite reimbursements to child care providers. The Commission receives monthly reports from SCDSS on the status of child care provider reimbursements.
- b. **2008 Activities:** The Commission's Child Care Committee is currently exploring issues related to the cost, quality and availability of child care for Public Assistance clients as well as working poor families, especially those who have left welfare for work. One option being explored is a pilot program to train home-based child care providers to improve their business management and service delivery skills and to provide ancillary supports for the parents who utilize these child care providers.

6. **Extended Hours at SCDSS:**

- a. At the request of several parish outreach coordinators, the Commission took up the issue of extended hours at SCDSS in 2007, including allowing clients to enter the centers after 3:00 PM and opening the centers one evening a week to accommodate working families who need SCDSS services but cannot take a day off from work to go to a center during daytime hours.
- b. The Commission voted to support the concept of extended hours and, in November, 2007, sent a letter to the Legislature asking that the issue be given their attention. As a result, SCDSS Commissioner Janet DeMarzo filed a report with the Suffolk County Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee on May 8<sup>th</sup> 2008, outlining three options for opening SCDSS in the evenings.
- c. **2008 Activities:** **The Commission voted in May, 2008 to support "Option C" in the Commissioner's report on extended hours which would create a working families call in center open one evening a week at a central location for an annual cost of \$98,000 (possibly as low as \$40,000 when federal and State reimbursements are factored into the County costs.)** The Commission is awaiting a final cost assessment for this proposal as well as an assessment of the 11% to 13% of vacant SCDSS positions which may impede the ability of SCDSS to open in the evenings and to allow clients to enter the centers after 3:00 PM.

7. **Biennial Employment Plan Assessments:** The Commission reviewed the 2004-2005 and the 2006-2007 and the 2008-2009 SCDSS draft biennial *Temporary Assistance and Food*

*Stamp Employment Plan* which is the County's blueprint for moving people from welfare to work. A number of topics in the biennial employment plan were referred by the Commission to its standing committees for further study. The Commission made one formal recommendation to the 2004-2005, 2006-2007 and 2008-2009. draft biennial plans:

- **Work Activities be amended to allow clients to attend college in either the first or second year of study, rather than just in the second year as presently stated in the biennial. This recommendation was accepted by the Commissioner for the 2008-2009 biennial plan.**

**8. State Budget Assessments:**

- a. During March and April, 2004, **the Commission held two public hearings** addressing proposed federal changes in welfare regulations (TANF reauthorization) and the proposed changes in state welfare regulations contained in Governor George Pataki's 2004 state budget and proposed reductions in Family Health Plus and Medicaid coverage. **The Commission reported its findings to the Legislature on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2004 with a recommendation that Sense Resolution 53 be adopted in which the Suffolk County Legislature express its opposition to the Governor's proposed social service and health care reductions.** Sense Resolution 53 was adopted by the Legislature on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2004.
- b. **The Commission examined the proposed 2005 New York State budget** and determined that no formal action was necessary since most of the proposals that would impact departments of social services had been re-introduced following their defeat in the 2004 budget cycle and had already been thoroughly critiqued.
- c. **The Commission examined the proposed 2006 state budget** and voted on March 20, 2006, to send a letter to each of Long Island's nine state senators opposing Full Family Sanctioning, which was removed from the budget by the State Legislature.
- d. The Commission did not examine the **proposed 2007 and 2008 state budgets** because there was little evidence of significant impact on social services.

**9. FFFS Assessment: The Commission examined the new Flexible Fund for Family Services (FFFS) block grant included in the 2005 State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance budget.** The Commission met with representatives of SCDSS to ascertain the impact that FFFS might have on the County. The Commission's investigation revealed that, despite state promises that FFFS would provide SCDSS the possibility of "significantly higher amounts" of state funds for use in "areas of their choosing," **the County would actually receive about \$2 million less for the affected programs.** The Commission forwarded its findings to each member of the Suffolk County Legislature.

**10. County Budget Assessments: The Commission examined the proposed 2006 County budgets for the Departments of Social Services and Labor.** While there was some concern about reductions in DOL funding due to losses in federal funds, SCDSS and SCODOL staff reported that their proposed budgets seemed adequate for 2006. The Commission did not examine the **proposed 2007 and 2008 county budgets** because there was little evidence of significant impact on social services.

**Commission Members:**

**Richard Koubek, Ph.D., Chair**, for Legislator Kate Browning

**Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair**, Tutor Time

**James Anderson**, Suffolk County Department of Labor

**Idania Aponte**, The INN

**Peter Barnett**, Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corporation for Hon. Elie Mystal, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature

**Peggy Boyd**, Family Service League

**Gwendolyn Branch**, Long Island Council of Churches

**Judy Cahn**, Eastern Suffolk BOCES

**Joan Grant**, EOC of Suffolk County, Inc.

**Robert Greenberger**, F. E. G. S. Health and Human Services System

**Edward Hernandez**, Suffolk County Department of Social Services

**Cheryl Keshner**, Nassau/Suffolk Law Services

**Pam Killoran**, Workforce Investment Board

**Nina Leonhardt**, Suffolk County Community College

**Barbara LoMoriello** for Presiding Officer William Lindsay

**Michael Stoltz**, Clubhouse of Suffolk

**Pat Tracy**, Gerald Ryan Outreach Center

**Ken Zone**, Long Island Cares Inc, Harry Chapin Food Bank