

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

January 16, 2008

Present: Richard Koubek, Kathy Liguori, Gwendolyn Branch, Greg Blass, Nina Leonhardt, Rob Greenberger, Michael Stoltz, James Andrews, Pam Killoran, Cheryl Keshner, Idania Aponte, Peggy Boyd

Guests, Don Friedman (Commission consultant), Janet Walerstein, Audrey Rudolph, Tom Grecco, Kim Staab,

1. **Minutes:** The minutes of the November 21st meeting were adopted unanimously, with a correction to item #7, on a motion by Michael Stoltz, seconded by James Andrews.
2. **Election of Commission Officers:** The Commission practice has been to elect its chair and vice chair for two year terms that coincide with the beginning of the legislative two-year terms of office. The Commission unanimously re-elected:
 - a. Chair: Richard Koubek
 - b. Vice Chair: Kathy Liguori
3. **Housing Report Follow-Up:** Richard Koubek reported that he was asked to address the LI Regional Planning Board on January 8th regarding the MICAH project. He used this occasion to follow-up with the Board, as requested by the Commission, on the Commission's affordable housing report. He noted that the Downstate Suburban Workforce Housing for Economic Sustainability bill, containing a package of incentives for municipalities that create affordable housing, came out of the Board's June, 2006 25 point plan which itself reflected many of the recommendations in the Commission's housing report, including a study of town housing needs and the setting of town housing goals.
4. **Extended Hours at SCDSS:** Commissioner Janet DeMarzo invited Richard Koubek and several of the parish outreach coordinators who served as Commission consultants on this issue, to a two hour meeting on January 11th to discuss extended hours. Deputy Commissioners Greg Blass and Ed Hernandez were in attendance as was Kim Staab and several other SCDSS management staff. The meeting was very productive. The Commissioner raised questions about the population who might be served by evening hours as well as the possible costs. She discussed the possibility of pilot testing evening hours at the Mary Gordon building. Her staff will conduct a needs assessment, looking back at cases over a selected period of time, to try to determine how many SCDSS clients were working when they applied for services. She asked not-for-profits to also research the numbers of their clients who qualify for SCDSS services but cannot receive them due to the lack of evening hours. She promised to reconvene this group in about two months with a preliminary report. It was noted that Legislator Ed Romaine has introduced a resolution, titled IR 1001-08. "To Implement Welfare to Work Commission Recommendation," that calls on the Commissioner to submit a report on a plan, with a cost analysis, regarding extended hours. It was further noted that SCDSS will pilot test, for the State, telephone

enrollments of all potential food stamp clients, with the waiving of fingerprinting, that will therefore eliminate the need for clients to come into a SCDSS center.

5. **Education/Training Pilot:** Nina Leonhardt reported that the second year of the pilot will begin in the spring. The County has not yet transferred the unused funds from the 2007 budget to the SC Community College 2008 budget. James Andrews expressed concerns about the job retention rate of pilot students at one of the receiving employers. This issue will be taken up at the next meeting.
6. **Employment Assessment Committee:** Chair Robert Greenberger announced that the Committee will meet with representatives of SCDSS, SCDOL and EAC on January 31st on SDSS assessment procedures and their possible connection with sanctions. EAC is contracted to conduct the SCDSS sanctions intervention programs. A full report of this meeting will be made at the February Commission meeting
7. **Congressional Visits:** Richard Koubek reported that efforts are underway to schedule appointments with Congressmen Peter King, Steve Israel and Tim Bishop to discuss the Commission's concerns, sent in a letter to them in June, 2007, regarding the 2005 Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) and the new TANF participation regulations that came from the US Department of Health and Human Services as a result of the welfare reauthorization contained in the DRA. The first meeting was scheduled to be with Congressman Bishop on February 4th. Richard Koubek, Peter Barnett and consultant Don Friedman would attend.
8. **SCDSS Biennial Employment Plan:** SCDSS staff Kim Staab and Tom Grecco provided the Commission with a detailed overview of the 2008-2009 SCDSS Biennial Employment Plan. Richard Koubek expressed the Commission's gratitude for SCDSS getting an extension on the 30 day comment period so that it could have this meeting to provide comments. There was much discussion of the pressures placed on both SCDSS and SCDOL due to the new TANF participation requirements and the new, restrictive definitions of countable activities. Commission members were especially concerned about the burdensome reporting requirements that have accompanied the new TANF regulations. Several motions were introduced regarding the Biennial:
 - a. Motion by Nina Leonhardt, seconded by Cheryl Keshner, to amend Section 3.6, "Suffolk Works College Policy" #2 to read, "Assuming appropriate college assessments, the individual [should be able to attend college] within the first 12 months or within 12 months (27 credits) of completing a two year program." After extended discussion, the Motion passed: 5 Yes; 4 No and 2 Abstentions.
 - b. On the question of whether the Commission should oppose the new work requirement of 40 hours a week (instead of the federal requirement of 35 hours a week,) there was no motion after extended discussion as to whether the additional five hours provide a necessary cushion for both SCDSS/DOL and the clients.
 - c. Regarding the OTDA requirement that districts increase participation in vocational education programs by 20 percent, and the inclusion of the Commission's Pilot as one option for doing so, a motion was made by Nina Leonhardt, seconded by Michael Stoltz, that Section 3.6c should read, "If the second year of the Pilot again proves successful, the County should take steps

to fund case managers/mentors to work with all clients who enter certified education and training programs.” The motion carried: 10 Yes, 1 No and 0 Abstentions.

- d. Regarding the additional reporting requirements, a motion was made by Michael Stoltz, seconded by Kathy Liguori, that the Commission registers “concern about the onerous reporting requirements contained in the new, unfunded TANF mandates.” The motion passed unanimously.

The above issues would be immediately conveyed by Chair Richard Koubek in a letter to Commissioner DeMarzo. (Letter attached)

9. The discussion of a Commission’s public forum on child care was tabled for the February meeting.

10. Next Meeting: February 15, 9:30 AM at SCDOL One Stop Center

Janet DeMarzo, Commissioner
Suffolk County Department of Social Services
PO Box 18100
Hauppauge, NY 11788-8900

Dear Commissioner DeMarzo:

On behalf of the Welfare to Work Commission, I want to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the SCDSS "Temporary Assistance and Food Stamp Employment Plan, 2008-2009." We are grateful that you secured an extension on the comment period and that you sent Kim Staab and Tom Grecco to the Commission's January 16th meeting to provide background and answer questions about this important Plan which is the Department's blueprint for moving people from welfare to work.

The first point I want to make is that the Commission adopted a resolution, unanimously, expressing our "concern about the onerous reporting requirements contained in the new, unfunded TANF mandates." Please know that the Commission wrote to each of Long Island's Congressional representatives, and to Senators Clinton and Schumer, in June, 2007, registering our concerns regarding the punitive and burdensome nature of these new requirements. Each member of the Suffolk County Legislature received a copy of the letter. Beginning next month, we plan to meet with Congressmen Bishop, Israel and King to ask that they work to amend these regulations.

With regard to the Employment Plan, the Commission has two recommendations:

1. Believing that there should be more flexibility in allowing clients to attend a full-time associate's degree program in their first year of study instead of only in the second year, the Commission recommends that Section 3.6, Suffolk Works College Policy, item #2 should read, "Assuming appropriate college assessments, the individual [should be able to attend college] within the first 12 months or within 12 months (27 credits) of completing a two year program."
2. Regarding the OTDA requirement that districts increase participation in vocational education programs by 20 percent, and your including the Commission's Pilot as one option for doing so, Section 3.6c should read, "If the second year of the Pilot again proves successful, the County should take steps to fund case managers/mentors to work with all clients who enter certified education and training programs."

Thank you for your attention to these recommendations,

Yours truly

Richard Koubek, Ph.D., Commission Chair

CC; Presiding Officer William Lindsay
Members of the Health and Human Services Committee