

Welfare to Work Commission
Of the Suffolk County legislature

Minutes of the meeting of February 15, 2008

Present: Pam Killoran, Gregory Blass, Jack Caffey, James Andrews, Ken Zone, Nina Leonhardt, Peggy Boyd, Kathy Liguori, Richard Koubek

Guests: Don Friedman, Consultant, Lourdes Bautista and Elisa Cusimano from the Child Care Council of Suffolk.

1. **Welcomes:** Richard Koubek called the meeting to order, and greeted new member Jack Caffey, representing the Presiding Officer, and two guests from the Child Care Council of Suffolk.
2. **Minutes:** The minutes from the January meeting were unanimously adopted on motion by Peter B., seconded by Peggy B.
3. **Commissioner's Response to the Employment Plan Recommendations:** Richard Koubek reported that he had sent the Commission's comment on the 2008-2009 SCDSS Employment Plan to the Commissioner Janet DeMarzo in a letter dated 1/17/08. He received a response from Comm. DeMarzo, dated 2/7/08:
 - a. **Right to attend community college:** The Commission had urged SCDSS to modify its policy of permitting full-time attendance in an associate's degree program only for the second year of the program, and to instead permit attendance in such a program for either the first or second year. Commissioner DeMarzo's response indicated that DSS had decided, as a result of the recommendation, to authorize this modification.
 - b. **Using the Commission's Mentoring/Case Management Education/Training Pilot program as an option for implementing OTDA's requirement of increasing participation in vocational education by 20%:** Commissioner DeMarzo responded that the employment plan was not the "proper venue for this funding initiative..." She also noted that Suffolk has implemented a new "continuous enrollment" voc. ed. policy with Eastern BOCES. James Andrews explained that with continuous enrollment, some difficulties with getting participants engaged promptly should be alleviated

In response to a question from Peter Barnett, James Andrews noted that GED participation can count towards non-core hours for all participants except teen parent head of households for whom GED counts as core. All agreed that GED studies should count as core hours.

4. **Education/Training Pilot:** Nina Leonhardt lead off the discussion, which relates to the continuous enrollment issue noted in item #3(b). It is difficult for programs to

allow for continuous enrollment, which suggests that a new program cycle must be ready to go whenever someone new comes to the program. It was agreed that the Education Training Committee will meet to discuss the issue. Nina also reported that the funds for the 2008 pilot have not yet been transferred to Suffolk County Community College, thereby delaying the start of the pilot.

5. **Meeting with Congressman Bishop:** Richard Koubek noted that he, Peter Barnett and Commission consultant Don Friedman had met on February 5th with Congressman Tim Bishop to discuss the Commission's concerns with the new TANF regulations that grew out of the 2005 Deficit Reduction Act (DRA). Richard Koubek gave the Congressman the sections of the 2008 SCDSS Employability plan so he could see the burdensome reporting requirements. It was felt that the Congressman did not fully appreciate how burdensome the new TANF administrative requirements are. Congressman Bishop was supportive of changes in the DRA, but cautioned that no change was likely before there was a new president in office. But he did ask for proposed language to amend existing DRA. Don Friedman will start working on possible changes. The Congressman was also interested in Maine's Parents as Scholars, which Peter Barnett discussed. Peter also provided a paper he and his wife have written about "educating people off of welfare." James Andrews noted that President Bush's 2008-09 budget makes cuts in WIA, with more money for "career transition vouchers," but he's not at all convinced such a plan is viable.
6. **SCDSS Extended Hours:** Richard Koubek and Kathy Liguori testified at the legislature in support of a resolution requiring a study on the need for extended hours at the centers. The Commissioner also testified and said she may be open to a pilot at the Mary Gordon building, and is preparing a study on the cost and the need. Given DSS's willingness to investigate, the resolution urging a study was tabled.
 - a. Greg Blass stated that SCDSS is now looking back at 200 applicant cases to determine the need for extended hours.
 - b. Peggy Boyd noted that Nassau DSS is now looking to reduce its hours, due particularly to the cost of overtime and the fact that not many clients are availing themselves of the added hours. However, Richard Koubek stated that 200 people are coming to the Nassau DSS center during evening hours.
 - c. Cheryl Keshner said that 3 other NYS counties are also being studied and that we should try to find out which they are. It was agreed that it will be most useful if one or more of the counties is comparable to Suffolk in size.
 - d. Richard Koubek recalled the sanctions discussion of the previous meeting, noting that Professor Vicki Lens had found in her research of Suffolk sanctioned clients that many of those sanctioned were highly motivated, but had multiple obligations which possibly prevented them from attending a meeting at SCDSS, thereby causing their sanction. This might be a situation where extended hours would help. Greg Blass. and James Andrews stated that Suffolk strives to reduce unnecessary appointments, and already often gives people a second chance when they miss an appointment.

7. **Food Stamp Finger Imaging:** The Commissioner had recently stated that she was open to waiving finger imaging, but a recent *Suffolk Life* article reported that County Executive Steve Levy was talking with the OTDA about retaining finger imaging, despite the provisions of the State's new Working Families Initiative. Greg Blass stated that SCDSS is awaiting final word from Commissioner DeMarzo on how to proceed, but, noting that only 4 states in the country use finger imaging, its value is unclear, and he thinks they're leaning in the direction of not requiring it.

8. **Child Care:**
 - a. Prompt payment: Kathy Liguori discussed the Prompt Payment bill – addressing only child care-related contracts – and the fact that it had passed the County Legislature and that the County Executive's veto had then been overridden. Kathy stated that in the event of late payment, the County would have to make the payment plus interest. The department has been short-staffed – a report by the County Comptroller stated that with proper staffing all payments could be made within 30 days.
 - b. Some concern was expressed that if the county takes steps to make child care payments timely, other contracts might suffer. Greg Blass confirmed that child care contracts now average 28-29 days, while other contract payments average 44 days. He also said that getting full staffing is a challenge with a tight budget in which the county exec. has called for all departments to reduce staffing by 10%.
 - c. Richard Koubek reported about Smart Government for Strong Families, a coalition working on prompt payment issues, and suggested we might want to invite its director, Erica Chase, to a future meeting.
 - d. The Commission next discussed holding a Public hearing on child Care. The guests from the Child Care Council noted that they have staff “in the trenches,” and realized how difficult lining up good child care can be, and that they applaud the Commission's efforts. Questions that must be addressed: what would be the purpose of the Hearing? Who would be the target audience?
 - e. Kathy Liguori stated that she sees affordable child care is the key goal. This of course ties in with other issues, like affordable housing. There was a discussion about the funding of pre-K, which is really early education, not child care. It was noted that some pre-K. services go to families that could afford to purchase such services. Peggy Boyd suggested that school districts should be working with non-profits to provide the best mix of services. One pre-K issue is that if it's only provided for 2½ hours a day, it is not adequate for working parents.
 - f. A discussion of various potential issues for the Public Hearing on Child Care ensued. Issues included the above discussion of the interaction between child care and universal pre-K., affordability, standards of care, eligibility standards for subsidized child care and co-payments for subsidized child care.. It was suggested that we look at the Winning Beginnings website, particularly their policy priorities.

- g. There was consensus that the Hearing should reach out to parents, providers, government agencies, and to think about collaborations between non-profits and the schools. To reach parents, the Hearing may need to be held in the evening.
 - h. Kathy Liguori moved, and Cheryl Keshner seconded a motion to hold a Public Hearing on Child Care. This was, in a friendly manner, amended to become a motion authorizing the formation of a committee to make a recommendation on whether to hold a forum. The committee's mission will be to share and refine the issues, bearing in mind this Commission's mandate to make recommendations to the Legislature on issues related to welfare reform. The motion passed 10-0.
 - i. A Committee was formed to make a recommendation on the Public Hearing. The members are: Peggy Boyd, Kathy Liguori, Richard Koubek, Greg Blass, and Jack Caffey. The Child Care Council can serve as consultants, and others might be sought out for consultation as well.
9. **Commission Attendance:** Kathy Liguori expressed concern that there was weak attendance by a small number of members, and she suggested that they should be contacted to see if it was appropriate for them to remain on the Comm. There are no rules currently in place on this issue. The Commission has no by-laws and acts in accordance with the Resolution which created the Commission and general Roberts Rules of Order. Pam Killoran moved that if a Commission member misses three consecutive meetings, the Chair or Vice-chair will contact the person to discuss his/her absences. If there is no response, they will contact the person's agency to request a different representative to the Commission. James Andrews seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.
10. **Next Meeting:** Friday, March 14, 9:30 Am at the One Stop Center of SCDOL.