

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

**Minutes of the March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2008 Meeting**

**Present:** Richard Koubek, Kathy Liguori, Jack Caffey, Rob Greenberger, Frederick Combs for Joan Grant, Michael Stoltz, James Andrews, Pam Killoran, Ken Zone, Peter Barnett, Greg Blass

**Guests:** Don Friedman, Empire Justice Center consultant, Peter Crisano, SCDOL

1. **Minutes:** The minutes of the February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2008 Commission meeting were accepted, as amended, on a unanimous vote on a resolution by Peter Barnett and seconded by James Andrews.
2. **Congressman Israel meeting:** Commission members Richard Koubek, Peter Barnett and consultant Don Friedman will meet with Congressman Steve Israel at 1PM on April 18<sup>th</sup> in his Hauppauge office to discuss the Commission's concerns about the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 and the resulting new TANF regulations. This is the second congressional meeting. Congressman Tim Bishop was visited on this issue in January.
3. **Employment Assessment Committee:** Chair Rob Greenberger reported on several meetings held in January and February that focused on whether an improved SCDSS assessment tool and process might reduce sanctions.
  - a. The Committee had a very productive meeting with SCDSS and SCDOL staff and the EAC Sanctions Intervention Project staff on January 18<sup>th</sup> at which they reviewed the excellent results this project has achieved in reducing the clients already in the sanctions process. (Minutes of this meeting will be distributed.) Between December of 2004 and December of 2008, for example, the number of sanctioned clients fell from 800 (20% of clients) to 293 (6%) of clients. The percent of clients in the sanction process fell from 27% in January, 2006 to 16% in January, 2007. James Andrews pointed out that SCDOL staff also work on sanctions reductions. Professor Vicki Lens from Columbia University conducted a study of sanctioned clients and fair hearings in SCDSS and concluded that some clients who are fulfilling their responsibilities (she referred to them as "highly-motivated" clients) are unnecessarily sanctioned on "technicalities." SCDSS administrator Kim Staab indicated a willingness to look at "holistic sanctioning," i.e., possibly waiving a sanction if the client's record indicates long-term compliance, as well as examining whether evening hours might allow these clients to fulfill minor requirements, such as document drop offs, without interrupting their work or school schedules with daytime appointments.
  - b. Kim Staab announced at the January meeting that OTDA is supposed to release a new assessment tool in April. The Committee thus decided to suspend discussions of the current assessment process, pending release of the new tool.

- c. The February Committee meeting heard from welfare rights attorney Carry LaCheen who profiled difficulties statewide with the sanctioning process. Greg Blass indicated his willingness to continue meeting with the Committee to address questions she raised regarding the screening of disabled clients as required in OTDA's 06 ADM 05. James Andrews will also join the Committee.
- 4. **Food Stamp Fingerprinting:** Greg Blass reported that there is still no final determination from the County Executive regarding the possibility of waiving fingerprinting for Food Stamp applicants.
- 5. **Child Care Committee:** Co-Chair Kathy Liguori reported that the Committee met in February to discuss whether the Commission should hold public hearings on child care. She noted that a 2004 Rauch Foundation study had numerous recommendations on child care, most of which were never implemented. She identified a number of State and County public-policy issues that might be advanced by public hearings, including: (1) adding \$140 million to the State budget to expand child care slots and restore slots that have been lost; (2) raising the eligibility for Child Care Block Grant subsidized child care from 200% to 275% of the Federal Poverty Level; (3) reducing the County required Family Share co-payment for subsidized child care from 25% to 10%.
  - a. A number of child care issues were discussed including reductions in State funding over the past several years, use of the FFFS to fund child care instead of the preferred Child Care Block Grant, the difficulty that poor and middle class families have accessing child care and the vital importance of child care to the health of the Suffolk economy. It was agreed that the Commission's exploration of child care should focus on the needs of poor and working poor families.
  - b. Following discussion of the Committee's proceedings, a motion was made by Kathy Liguori, seconded by Greg Blass, that the Commission hold public hearings, between 5PM and 8PM, in mid September to explore the child care industry in Suffolk County. Passed: Yes -11; No -0; Abstentions – 1.
- 6. **Extended hours at SCDS:** Richard Koubek noted that he received a letter from Legislator Ed Romaine urging the Commission to support his resolution calling upon the Commissioner to report her recommendations on extended hours to the Legislature by June. Other members of the Commission also received this letter. Mr. Koubek reported that he notified Legislator Romaine in February that the Commissioner was already working on this report and that it is expected to be released in April.
- 7. **Commission Membership and Attendance:**
  - a. Pam Killoran stated that a resolution has been introduced in the Legislature by the Presiding Officer that sets attendance requirements for Commissions. She noted a similarity to the policy adopted at the February Commission meeting that was intended to set attendance standards for the Commission.
  - b. Cheryl Keshner announced that she is leaving Nassau Suffolk Law Services on April 1<sup>st</sup> to join the Empire Justice Center. Her seat will have to be filled by Nassau Suffolk Law Services.

- c. It was agreed that the Commission would examine its statutory membership at the next meeting with the intent of possibly asking the Legislature to amend the resolution that created the Commission so as to add or eliminate agencies as members.
8. **TANF Regulations:** Don Friedman reported on several new TANF regulations that allow States to be more flexible with education and training. He noted that the Commission should urge OTDA to adopt these changes and to adopt a policy that does not unreasonably restrict clients from enrolling in education and training.
  - a. States can now count unsupervised homework as a work activity.
  - b. States can place clients in a 4 year college program.
9. **Smart Government for Strong Families:** Michael Stoltz reported on this Health and Welfare Council of LI coalition that is working to improve the contract and payment process for funded agencies in Suffolk County. The coalition is setting its agenda and refining its objectives in April and May. It was agreed that Coalition Director Erica Chase should be invited to report on their activities at a Commission meeting in late spring or summer.
10. **Next Meeting:** Friday, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 9:30 AM at the One Stop Center of SCDOL.