

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

**Minutes of the June 4, 2008 Meeting**

**Present:** Richard Koubek, Kathy Liguori, Linda O'Donohoe, Judy Cahn, James Andrews, Pam Killoran, Peter Barnett, Frederick Combs for Joan Grant, Jack Caffey, Ken Zone, Gwen Branch, Ellen Krakow, Michael Stoltz, Idania Aponte, Rob Greenberger

**Excused:** Sondra Bachety, Nina Leonhardt, Peggy Boyd

**Guests:** Consultants Don Friedman, Empire Justice Center; Kathy Malloy, SCAME.

1. **Minutes:** The minutes of the May 5, 2008 meeting were approved unanimously on a motion by James Andrews, seconded by Judy Cahn.
2. **Commission Membership:**
  - a. Richard Koubek welcomed Ellen Krakow from Nassau/Suffolk Law Services who will be replacing Cheryl Keshner on the Commission.
  - b. Richard Koubek reported that Terry Pearsall, Presiding Officer William Lindsay's Chief of Staff, said that all duly authorized Commission members should remain in place pending the outcome of legislation to update the Commission's membership.
  - c. Richard Koubek reported that Legislators Vivian Vioria Fisher and William Lindsay introduced IR 1497-2008 "Amending Membership of the Suffolk County Welfare to Work Commission" that would delete the seat held by a high school teacher appointed by the Suffolk County Superintendent's Association and add the following members: Suffolk County Association of Municipal Employees (SCAME); Empire Justice Center; Family Service League and Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corporation. The resolution will be laid on the table June 10<sup>th</sup>, go to the Health and Human Services Committee June 19<sup>th</sup> and, if reported out of Committee, be voted by the full Legislature on June 24<sup>th</sup>.
  - d. Richard Koubek announced that Legislator Kate Browning has been appointed Chair of the Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee and that he will be serving as Legislator Browning's representative on the Commission. Mr. Koubek is leaving Catholic Charities which will choose a replacement for him to serve on the Commission.
3. **Extended Hours at SCDSS:** Commission members Richard Koubek, Kathy Liguori and Peter Barnett were on the agenda of the Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee meeting of May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2008, to present the Commission's position on extended hours at SCDSS after Commissioner Janet DeMarzo delivered her report on the subject.
  - a. They reported that Commissioner DeMarzo provided an objective overview of the three options, though she concluded that evening hours would serve few clients seeking Emergency Aid for Families (EAF) because she said that this

program is capped at families earning \$35,200 a year in gross income. Richard Koubek testified in his response that this information is incorrect in that families seeking EAF are capped at \$35,200 of “available gross income” after fixed expenses are deducted such as rent and food. EAF families can, in fact, earn a gross income in excess of \$50,000 a year which therefore broadens the number of working families who might benefit from evening hours.

- b. Legislator John Kennedy asked probing questions about the Commissioner’s projected \$98,000 cost for “Option C” that would open a centralized “working family emergency call in center.” The Commissioner reported that this figure did not include State and federal salary reimbursements. She promised to provide the Legislature with a revised cost estimate that factors in these reimbursements.
  - c. Legislator Barraga and Richard Koubek engaged in a lively dialogue regarding the 11% to 13% of authorized, vacant SCDSS positions which could impede the Department’s ability to provide extended hours. Legislator Barraga argued that these vacancies are necessary to close the County’s \$150 million deficit. Mr. Koubek argued that the vacancies suggest poor budget practices since they appear to be routinely factored into the budget.
  - d. Peter Barnett responded to Legislator Barraga that proper staffing of SCDSS would save the County money in the long run from people who receive services such as evening hours for EAF, by avoiding possible costly County homeless interventions, or through education and training programs that lead to jobs that pay self sufficiency wages and therefore pay higher taxes.
  - e. Richard Koubek reported that parish outreach coordinators will be meeting with members of the Health and Human Services Committee to continue the dialogue on extended hours. He will reach out to Legislator Kennedy regarding the revised cost estimates for “Option C.” Mr. Koubek, Ms. Liguori and Mr. Barnett agreed that the May 8<sup>th</sup> testimony was a very constructive public dialogue on both the issue of extended hours and the related issue of understaffing at both SCDSS and SCDOL.
4. **Understaffing at SCDSS:** The Commission moved into an extensive discussion of understaffing at both SCDSS and SCDOL, particularly the failure of the County Executive to fill authorized, budgeted positions.
- a. Kathy Malloy stated that SCAME has a study of understaffing at SCDSS and that, pending approval of her union leadership, she would share the study with the Commission. She noted that the employees she represents are stretched to the limit and that overtime must be paid to fulfill on-going work responsibilities.
  - b. James Andrews stated that he has lost 10 workers since October, 2007, and that these positions still have not been filled.
  - c. It was agreed that understaffing would be a Commission priority for 2008, to be included in the Commission’s annual report to the Legislature.
    - i. Richard Koubek would reach out to SCDOL Commissioner Robert Dow to request data on understaffing.

- ii. It was also agreed that not-for-profit groups, such as Catholic Charities, which have been impacted by understaffing in such ways as delayed payments, contracts and reimbursements, might also be contacted for data.
  - iii. And, it was agreed that Richard Koubek would reach out to Gail Vizzini of the Legislative Budget Office for assistance in securing data on understaffing.
  - iv. Richard Koubek will reach out to Erica Chase of the Smart Government for Strong Families Coalition to determine if there is overlap between their work on contract delays and the Commission's interest in understaffing.
  - v. The above understaffing issues will be taken up again at the July Commission meeting.
5. **Education/Training Pilot:** Judy Cahn reported that the 2008 pilot will be housed at Eastern Suffolk BOCES which, despite a \$900,000 cut in funding, will be able to administer the program, beginning in July. There remained a number of technical issues to be resolved, related to the funding cuts and literacy programs, but Ms. Cahn believed that these will be worked out in time for the pilot to be launched.
  6. **Employment Assessment Committee:** Committee Chair Rob Greenberger reported that the new OTDA assessment tool which was due to be circulated in June has not yet been released. He will look into reconvening the Committee to pursue the concept of holistic assessment of a client's case which was discussed at an earlier meeting with Kim Staab and other SCDOL staff. Holistic assessment would involve a case worker reviewing the client's entire computerized record to determine if there is a pattern of infractions before imposing a sanction.
  7. **Child Care Committee:** Kathy Liguori reported that at the May 20<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Committee there seemed to be a growing consensus that a public hearing on child care issues would not be in order at this time. The Committee did discuss the possibility of seeking legislative funding for a pilot program that would train home-based child care providers to improve their management and service skills while providing ancillary services and training to parents who use their services. The Committee's focus continues to be on the affordability, quality and cost of services, with special attention to lower-income working families who qualify for subsidized child care.
  8. **Announcement:** Linda O'Donohoe announced that SCDSS had recently been informed that the State is cutting back \$6 million in SCDSS child care funding for Title XX subsidized child care services. It was agreed that the loss of these "rollover" savings funds would have very negative impacts on working poor families.
  9. **Next Meeting:** The Commission will meet again on Tuesday, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2:00 PM at SCDOL One Stop center.