

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

Minutes of the Meeting of November 21, 2007

Present: Kathy Liguori; Richard Koubek; Nina Leonhardt; Cheryl Keshner; Rob Greenberger; Judy Cahn; James Andrews; Michael Stoltz; Pam Killoran; Peter Barnett; Peggy Boyd; Ed Hernandez

Guest: Don Friedman, Empire Justice Center

1. **Minutes:** The minutes of the October 11th meeting were adopted, as amended, by a unanimous vote.
2. **Legislative Testimony:**
 - a. Richard Koubek, Cheryl Keshner and Kathy Liguori reported on their testimony, on behalf of the Commission, before the Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee on November 15th. One part of the testimony was to report the success of the Education and Training Pilot Program. SC Community College teacher/mentor Faye Sutherland along with former student Melissa Snyder joined in the testimony on the Pilot.
 - b. The rest of the testimony was in support of the concept of extended hours at SCDSS (allowing clients to enter the centers after 3PM and opening one evening a week.) Parish outreach coordinators Mary Weiler and Joan McGay, who had served as Commission consultants on this issue, also testified. Committee Chair Ele Mystal expressed strong interest in the concept of extended hours and asked to be kept informed. SCDSS Commissioner Janet DeMarzo approached Dr. Koubek after the session to ask that he survey parish outreach coordinators as to what services they are providing that SCDSS could provide with evening hours. She noted that she supports the idea of evening hours and asked that a meeting be set up with her to discuss how extended hours might be implemented.
3. **Extended Hours at SCDSS:** Presiding Officer Bill Lindsay called Richard Koubek, in response to the Commission's letter to the Legislature, to express his support for the concept of extended hours. An article on the extended hours testimony appeared in *Newsday*. Richard Koubek yielded the chair to Vice Chair Kathy Liguori. The Commission then discussed whether it should remain in partnership with Catholic Charities and the outreach coordinators as the extended hours issue moves forward.
 - a. A motion was made and seconded for members of the Commission and other interested consultants such as the Catholic Charities, parish outreach coordinators and the LI Council of Churches to meet with Commissioner DeMarzo. The motion passed: 9 Yes, 0 No, 3 Abstentions: Pam Killoran, Ed Hernandez, James Andrews.
 - b. Peggy Boyd, Cheryl Keshner and Richard Koubek will represent the Commission at this meeting.
 - c. It was agreed that the Commission would have to approve any additional issues that may arise in the discussion of extended hours.

4. **SCDSS Staff Vacancies:** Ed Hernandez reported that the number of SCDSS center authorized/funded/unfilled welfare examiner vacancies (cited in the Commission's letter to the Legislature on extended hours) has been reduced from 21 vacancies to 13. Another 13 unfilled positions are extended sick leaves. It was noted that the SC Department of Labor also has many unfilled positions.
5. **Family Service League's TLC Program:** Peggy Boyd reported on this program in which the Family Service League, in partnership with SCDSS, has opened its executive offices in Huntington as a temporary shelter for homeless singles during evening hours, after 9:30 PM. Many of these people have serious physical and mental impairments and are reluctant to enter the County shelter system. They are housed for one night, and provided with supportive services.
6. **Education Pilot:** Nina Leonhardt reported that the next Pilot cohort will begin in the spring. She is awaiting legislative authorization to carry \$15,000 unused funds from the 2007 Pilot over to the 2008 pilot. It was also announced that Peter Barnett will now serve as Co-Chair of the Commission's Education/Training Committee with Nina Leonhardt.
 - a. It was noted that the Education/Training Committee believes that Pilot case workers/mentors must be given access to the same client data systems as SCDSS and SCDOL workers if they are to work with Pilot participants in avoiding or removing sanctions.
7. **Employment Program Assessment Committee:** Chair Rob Greenberger reported that the Committee will be collecting data on the assessment process and whether there is a relation to sanctions. Don Friedman of the Empire Justice Center, who has significant expertise in welfare issues, particularly those related to TANF rules, assessments and sanctions, will serve as a consultant to this Committee. Mr. Greenberger announced that EAC, which administers several anti-sanction projects for SCDSS, will be invited to meet with the Committee in January.
 - a. The OTDA draft assessment tool was again discussed. Michael Stoltz pointed out that this tool is quite sophisticated and may require a mental health professional to administer it.
 - b. Peter Barnett proposed that non-profit agencies should collaborate with SCDSS and SCDOL in using their assessments to help guide clients through the public assistance system. Peggy Boyd echoed this point, calling for "blended systems" of government and private agencies working together to assess clients.
 - c. Richard Koubek pointed out that such public-private collaborations are important but that the Commission needs to stay focused on inadequacies in the government assessments that may cause misplacements and sanctions. He also reiterated that SCDSS has access to a new funding category known as Intensive Case Services (about \$140,000) which could be used to pilot a new assessment tool or process. James Andrews noted that the new TANF regulations do not always allow for policies and procedures that benefit the clients. They emphasize participations rates and impose financial penalties if these rates are not met.
 - d. The Employment Program Assessment Committee will research best practices and successful programs in other counties and states.

- e. Kim Staab will speak to the Commission at its next meeting on the SCDSS Employment Program.
8. **Commission Membership:**
- a. Richard Koubek announced that the Commission should hold elections for Chair and Vice Chair in January. These officer elections coincide with the start of each new two-year legislative term. He asked if anyone is willing to seek either the Chair or Vice Chair positions. He announced his candidacy for Chair. Kathy Liguori announced her candidacy for Vice Chair.
 - b. Members who joined the Commission after its original founding in 2003 must submit their names and addresses so as to receive the official oath of office from the Clerk of the Legislature.
 - c. Richard Koubek announced that, beginning in March, former SC Legislative Presiding Officer Sondra Bachety will be taking the Gerald Ryan Outreach seat on the Commission. Ms. Bachety is a member of the Gerald Ryan Outreach Board of Directors.
9. **Child Care Reimbursements:** Kathy Liguori reported that additional staff are being added to SCDSS to expedite prompt payments for child care providers, but that County Executive Steve Levy reported at a meeting with providers that he thought it unlikely that they would be paid within 30 days, as called for in the Prompt Payment bill. A pilot of the KinderTrack system may demonstrate that this computerized child attendance system can speed up the payment process. She reminded the County Executive that a County Comptroller's report showed that 69% of the additional staff recommended to expedite payments would be reimbursed by state and federal funds.
- a. Kathy Liguori suggested that the time has come for the Commission to hold public hearings on the Child Care industry. This was proposed two years ago, but no action taken because Commissioner DeMarzo thought little could come from these hearings. Ms. Liguori noted that the child care payment issue has shed new light on overall problems with child care and that hearings in 2008 could be very productive. This topic will be taken up at the next meeting.
10. **Congressional Meetings:** It was agreed that visits to Congressman Peter King, Steve Israel and Tim Bishop would attempt to be made in December to discuss the Commission's 2007 letter to them on the need to amend the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 so as to reduce the punitive new TANF participation regulations instituted in 2006. These meeting would pre-empt a December Commission meeting.
11. **Next Meeting: January 16th, 2008, 2:00 PM at SCDOL One Stop Center**