

Suffolk County Legislature



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WELFARE TO WORK COMMISSION **of the Suffolk County Legislature** **c/o Clerk of the Legislature** **725 Veterans Memorial Highway** **Smithtown NY 11787** **631-499-6725**

March 14, 2019

To: Members of the Suffolk County Legislature:

The Welfare to Work Commission is pleased to provide you with our annual report of 2018 Commission activities as well as our 2019 Commission goals. As you can see in the attached report, the Commission was again very active in 2018, by:

1. Continuing to pursue these goals in our 2012 report, "Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County":
 - a. Making recommendations on staffing levels at SCDSS and SCDOLL&CA and SCDOH.
 - b. Supporting Suffolk County bus service.
 - c. Create a tool to score community benefits offered by IDA applicants.
2. Expanding educational opportunities for SWEP clients by creating a pilot for the delivery of coordinated SWEP work experience, training and education and child-care services at Suffolk County Community College.
3. Supporting the newly-created Suffolk County Child Care Commission.
4. Exploring supportive housing options for people with behavioral health challenges.
5. Assessing the impact of federal immigration policies on Suffolk residents.
6. Monitoring possible changes in federal and State TANF policies.

The Welfare to Work Commission generally meets monthly, sometimes more often through our committees. All Commission members are volunteers who, individually or through their agencies, contribute many hours toward creating policies and practices that support people leaving welfare for work as well as working-poor people in Suffolk.

Yours truly for the Commission,

Richard Koubek

Richard Koubek, PhD, Chair

Kathy Liguori

Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair



Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature

Annual Report of 2018 Activities And 2019 Goals

March 14, 2019

As required by the 15th Resolve of Resolution No. 181-2003, the Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature is pleased to submit its annual report containing the Commission's goals for 2019 and a summary of its activities for 2018.

Welfare to Work Commission's 2019 Goals

1. Update the Commission's 2012 report, "Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County" with current poverty statistics in the context of addressing barriers to economic self-sufficiency in Suffolk County, including:
 - Creating a clearing house of in-demand jobs that pay self-sufficiency wages. The data would include Suffolk occupations most-in demand, growth-rates of in-demand occupations and their wage scales, training opportunities and requirements, etc.
 - Mental health services available to social-services clients to help them attain self-sufficiency. This goal may also include the Commission revisiting the issue of an OTDA/SCDSS mental-health screening tool.
 - The role that case management plays in helping poor people attain self-sufficiency.
 - The importance of financial literacy.
2. Continue to plan, implement and evaluate a pilot for expanding on-site educational and work opportunities for work-eligible Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Safety Net (SN) Suffolk Works Employment Program (SWEP) clients at Suffolk County Community College (SCCC) and Eastern Suffolk BOCES toward the goal of creating Suffolk County Department of Social Services and Suffolk County

- Department of Labor “hub centers” for the delivery of multiple SWEP services, including work experience, education, training and child care.
3. Monitor 2019 federal and State changes in TANF law and policy with special attention to education and training opportunities for SWEP clients.
 4. Review and make recommendations about staffing levels and access to services at the Suffolk County Department of Social Services (SCDSS), Suffolk County Department of Labor, Licensing and Consumer Affairs (SCDOLL&CA) and Suffolk County Department of Health (SCDOH).
 5. Pursue adoption of a scoring tool to measure supports provided to working-poor people by companies seeking a Suffolk County Industrial Development Agency (IDA) benefit.
 6. Support additional State funding for the Suffolk County bus system.
 7. Continue to pursue recommendations in the 2014 Commission report, “Who’s Minding the Kids? Meeting Challenges and Creating Opportunities for Quality Child Care and Early Learning in Suffolk County,” with special attention to supporting increased State funding for child care while continuing to address inequities in Suffolk’s State Child Care Block Grant (CCBG) allocation due to the inadequate CCBG formula used by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS.)
 8. Continue to explore barriers to housing for Suffolk residents with behavioral-health challenges through these policy recommendations for Suffolk County action contained in the Commission’s 2018 supportive-housing report to the Suffolk County Legislature:
 - Improve Single Point of Access (SPA) supportive-housing placements for people with mental illness;
 - Prioritize homeless families on Public Housing Authority waiting lists;
 - Create a coordinated County response to the lack of affordable housing.
 9. Continue to assess the impact of federal immigration policies on Suffolk County.

Activities Pursuant to the Commission’s 2018 Goals

Pursue Recommendations in the “Struggling in Suburbia” Report

The Commission continued to pursue these recommendations in its 2012 poverty report, “Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County”

1. ***Expand educational opportunities for SWEP clients.*** Through previous efforts by the Commission, the Suffolk County Department of Social Services (SCDSS) and Suffolk County Department of Labor, Licensing and Consumer Affairs (SCDOLL&CA), opportunities have been created for Suffolk Works Employment Program (SWEP) clients to attend Suffolk County Community College (SCCC) while they are also fulfilling their work requirement at SCCC. Due to staff changes at SCCC, there was a decrease in SWEP client participation in the pilot in 2017-2018. The Commission made increased participation in the pilot a 2018 goal by convening several meetings with newly appointed SCCC staff and key members of the SWEP unit. These meetings identified SCCC staff who will take responsibility for placing

SWEP clients in work and educational opportunities at SCCC. Lines of communication between SWEP and SCCC staff as well as responsibilities were defined. In addition, it was agreed that Eastern Suffolk BOCES, which has a SWEP education/work partnership with Family Service League of Long Island, would be added to the pilot. The pilot will be monitored throughout 2019.

2. **Recommendations about staffing levels at the SCDSS and SCDOLL&CA.** The Commission's poverty report highlighted the need for appropriate staffing at SCDSS and SCDOLL&CA and SCDOH. Following release of County Executive Bellone's 2019 budget, the Commission Chair consulted with the Commissioners of SCDSS and SCDOLL&CA and found that proposed staffing levels were adequate for SCDSS and SCDOLL&CA in the proposed 2019 budget. Kim Gierasch, the Commission member representing the SCDOH, reported that staffing was adequate for her department as well.
3. **Monitor the privatization of the County's health centers.** The Commission periodically received updates from SCDOH on the status of the County health centers, which were found to be providing adequate services. For this reason, the Commission deleted this goal for 2019.
4. **Monitor Suffolk bus service as it relates to the needs of poor and near-poor people.** The Commission's poverty report emphasized the need for expanded bus service. The Commission received a detailed report from Darnell Tyson, Deputy Commissioner of the Transportation Division of the Suffolk County Department of Public Works. Mr. Tyson described technological innovations that have been introduced to improve bus service and expand ridership. He also noted the purchase of smaller buses for off hours or less-travelled routes that will improve economic efficiency. Mr. Tyson confirmed that the typical Suffolk bus rider earns about \$24,000 a year which is why the Commission has long supported increased State funding for Suffolk bus. Efficient and affordable public transportation are critical to SWEP clients and working-poor Suffolk residents. Mr. Tyson stated that State funding for Suffolk bus service remains inadequate which is why the Commission is supporting additional State funding for Suffolk bus in the 2019 budget.
5. **Score IDA applicants on their supports for working-poor people.** In 2014, the Commission drafted a scoring tool that the IDA could use to assess applications for IDA grants. The scoring tool included such community benefits as: hiring union workers, minority contractors and local workers; paying the County living wage; prioritizing economically-stressed communities; providing child-care assistance to workers; providing on-the-job training; hiring Public Assistance recipients and long-term unemployed workers. It is the Commission's hope that this scoring tool might provide a model for all IDAs to use in Suffolk County and would thereby raise the standard for IDA grants at both the town and County levels. The tool was submitted to Sarah Lansdale, Director of the Suffolk County Planning Department, for her input and was presented to Suffolk County IDA staff Kelly Morris and John McNally on April 30th in 2018. The tool was subsequently sent by staff to the IDA Board. Commission members plan to meet with a Board representative in 2019 to pursue adoption of the tool.

Child Care

1. **Child Care Commission:** The Welfare to Work Commission holds a seat on the Suffolk County Child Care Commission and receives monthly reports of its activities. The Child Care Commission held a very successful summit in May of 2018. Commission members Richard Koubek and Kathy Liguori are participating in the planning the Child Care Commission's 2019 activities.
2. **CCBG Formula:** The Commission continued to assess the State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) Child Care Block Grant (CCBG) formula that has underfunded Suffolk County child care since 2008. The Commission will also be supporting the Child Care Commission's State budget requests to increase funding for the CCBG child-care subsidy and other child-care needs in Suffolk County.

ADA Policies for SCDSS

Discussions between interested parties and the County attorney about a County ADA policy concluded in 2017 with the adoption of County ADA policy. SCDSS has developed a required online ADA training for all employees, which it shared with the Commission. SCDSS is adapting the County policy to its policies and procedures. The Commission monitored SCDSS adaptations of the County ADA policy in 2018, for example, by receiving access to the online staff development program used to train staff to comply with the ADA policy. With adoption and implementation of the new SCDSS/County ADA policy, the Commission has removed this issue from its 2019 goals although the Commission will be attentive to and continue to monitor administration of the new ADA policy at DSS.

Supportive-Housing Report

In the fall of 2015, the Commission revisited its 2007 report on the lack of affordable housing in Suffolk County, noting that little has been accomplished in providing safe, affordable housing for very-low income residents earning under 50% of the Area Median Income. This housing vacuum was found to be especially onerous for people with behavioral-health challenges, especially those who are chronically homeless. The Commission created a Supportive Housing Work Group that met with stakeholders throughout 2017 and into the spring of 2018. Among the topics covered by the Work group were:

1. Identifying the unserved and underserved homeless population.
2. Profiling the chronically homeless population.
3. Exploring the Continuum of Care network of services for the homeless.
4. Assessing the "Housing First" model for sheltering homeless people.
5. Assessing the SPOA system for providing housing to people with behavioral health challenges.
6. Identifying innovative programs to serve the homeless, including: Community Housing Innovations' "Transitional Housing Program"; Family Service League's "TLC Emergency Housing Program"; Concern for Independent Living housing options; tiny homes.

The Supportive Housing Work Group, having held 17 sessions between February, 2016 and the spring of 2018, in which they interviewed 26 supportive-housing stakeholders, presented its draft report which was adopted by the Commission in June of 2018. The report contains these recommendations:

1. Countywide solutions:
 - a. Address the systemic lack of affordable housing for low-income people in Suffolk County.
 - b. Highlight short and long-term costs of not providing affordable and supportive housing.
 - c. Assist high-needs clients to complete supportive housing applications.
 - d. Improve SPA placements.
 - e. Prioritize federal Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG)
 - f. Prioritize homeless families on Public Housing Authority waiting lists.
 - g. Create a coordinated County response for low-income housing.
 - h. Improve Suffolk hospital discharge policies for homeless people
2. Encourage more flexibility by NYS Department of Health in allowing housing adaptations and conversions.
3. Carefully assess substandard housing before Suffolk County, towns and villages shut down such facilities, thereby adding to the homeless population
4. Create additional State supports for supportive housing.

The report was distributed to every Suffolk County legislator as well as County and State administrators whose departments are related to the supportive-housing issues, and to State and federal legislators representing Suffolk County. The report was released to the media at a September press conference which was covered by News 12, FIOS LI News, Vision Long Island and the Babylon Beacon. A presentation of the report to the Education and Human Services Committee is scheduled for the spring of 2019. During 2019, the Commission will monitor implementation of the report's recommendations, with special attention to these recommendations that call for Suffolk County action:

- Improve Single Point of Access (SPA) supportive-housing placements for people with mental illness;
- Prioritize homeless families on Public Housing Authority waiting lists;
- Create a coordinated County response to the lack of affordable housing.

Impact of Federal Immigration Policies on Suffolk County

Alarmed by reports that federal immigration policies are creating a climate of fear among undocumented immigrants in Suffolk County that is causing them to avoid supportive services which they need, the Commission studied this situation in 2018 by hearing presentations from five agencies that serve immigrants. The reporting agencies were:

- CARECEN
- Catholic Charities
- Empire Justice Center
- Health and Welfare Council of Long Island
- Long Island Jobs with justice

The Commission is concerned about these federal policy changes that are negatively affecting immigrants in Suffolk County:

- ICE arrests are up 50 percent on Long Island over the past two years;
- ICE arrests of undocumented immigrants with no criminal record have tripled;
- DACA (protection from deportation for undocumented children brought to the U.S. by their parents) and TPS (Temporary Protective Status for Haitians and some Central Americans) have been revoked.
- The Administration is considering a policy change that would make receipt of any public benefit grounds for barring or removing immigrants' legal status.

The Commission was especially concerned with the fate of the citizen children of undocumented parents who are entitled to supports that they may not be receiving. The report summarized these disturbing trends presented to the Commission:

- There has been a decline in women reporting cases of domestic violence.
- Immigrants are afraid to report crimes to the local police.
- Immigrant parents of citizen children are not renewing SNAP (Food Stamps) and WIC (Women, Infant and Children Nutritional Services) and they are afraid to seek assistance at local food pantries.
- Immigrants are not securing health care for themselves or their children through programs such as Medicaid and Child Health Plus.
- Immigrant parents are not applying for child-care subsidies to which their citizen children are entitled.

For this reason, the Commission produced a report summarizing what it learned from the immigration experts about the climate of fear that has been caused by stepped-up federal crackdowns on undocumented immigrants. The Commission also created an extensive list of community resources that legislators can use to assist their immigrant constituents. The report and resource compendium were presented to every County legislator at the December 18th General Meeting of the Legislature and were released at a December 19th press conference was covered by News 12, Telemundo and *Newsday*. The Commission will continue to monitor the impacts of federal immigration policies on Suffolk residents during 2019.

Potential Changes in Federal and State TANF Policies

Don Friedman of the Empire Justice Center, a Commission member whose agency monitors State and federal TANF policies, reported to the Commission in December, 2018 that, with the election of a Democratic New York State Senate majority, chances have improved for, among other initiatives, adoption of the Home Stability Support program to replace a very limited pilot for New York City and Rochester that the State legislature approved in 2018. This program would significantly supplement the Public-Assistance rent allowance so that it approaches the federal government's Fair Market Rents. Mr. Friedman also outlined draft "TANF discussion" ideas circulated in Congress in 2017-2018. These drafts contain a number of progressive concepts including:

- increased reliance on case management;

- an increase in the periods of time allotted for engagement in drug and alcohol treatment programs;
- greater flexibility for states to customize welfare work rules;
- including poverty reduction as a stated purpose of TANF;
- emphasis on immediate needs such as securing housing.

It remains to be seen how many of these federal discussion ideas will be translated into new TANF legislation or policies. The Commission will continue to monitor State and federal TANF policies in 2019.

Opioid Epidemic

The Commission learned in 2018 that the County has created an opioid addiction task force which meets frequently to address this pressing problem. For this reason, the Commission has removed the opioid addiction crisis from its 2019 goals.

Contract Agency Participation in the SWEP Program

The Commission explored strategies to encourage Suffolk County contract agencies to participate in the SWEP program and to accept SWEP clients. Having done so, the SWEP staff concluded that it would prefer to work with agencies individually to encourage their participation in SWEP. For this reason, this issue was eliminated from the Commission's 2019 goals

Conclusion

The Commission meets monthly and has created several committees that also meet to pursue issues such as the Supportive Housing Work Group. We look forward to working with the Legislature, SCDSS, SCDOLL&CA and SCDOH in 2019 to continue our mission to "evaluate and make recommendations of federal, State and county policies and procedures to move people from welfare to work."

Respectfully Submitted,

Richard Koubek, Ph.D., Commission Chair, Gerald Ryan Outreach Center
Kathy Liguori, Commission Vice Chair, Habitots Preschool and Child Care Centers

Ayesha Alleyne, Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corporation
Peggy Boyd, Family Service League
Christina DeLisi, For Presiding Officer DuWyane Gregory
Barbara Egloff, Eastern Suffolk BOCES
Charles Fox, EOC of Suffolk County
Don Friedman, Empire Justice Center

Kimberly Gierasch, Suffolk County Department of Health
Greta Guarton, Long Island Coalition for the Homeless
Michael Haynes, Long Island Cares/The Harry Chapin Food Bank
Arlene Jackson, Suffolk County Community College
Richard Krebs, Suffolk County Department of Labor, Licensing and Consumer Affairs
Christian Limbach, Suffolk County Association of Municipal Employees
Dennis Nowak, Acting Commissioner, Suffolk County Department of Social Services
Jeffrey Reynolds, Family and Children's Association/LICADD
Michael Stoltz, Clubhouse of Suffolk
Luis Valenzuela, Long Island Council of Churches
Beth Zweig, Nassau/Suffolk Law Services