

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

Minutes of the March 14, 2019 Meeting

Present:

Richard Koubek, Chair
Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair
Legislator Tom Donnelly
Ayesha Alleyne (Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corporation)
Christina DeLisi (Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory)
DJ Russo for Legislator Tom Donnelly
Barbara Egloff (Eastern Suffolk BOCES)
Charles Fox (EOC-LI)
Arlene Jackson (Suffolk County Community College)
Richard Krebs, (SC Department of Labor)
Traci Barnes for Dennis Nowak (Acting Commissioner, SC Department of Social Services);
Michael Stoltz (Association for Mental Health and Wellness); Christian Limbach
Luis Valenzuela (LI Council of Churches)
Beth Zweig, Nassau Suffolk Law Services

Excused); Peggy Boyd (Family Service League); Don Friedman (Empire Justice Center);
Kim Gierasch (Suffolk County Department of Health); Greta Guarton (LI Coalition for the
Homeless); Michael Haynes (LI Cares/Harry Chapin Food Bank); Christian Limbach, (SC
Association of Municipal Employees); Dr. Jeffrey Reynolds (Family and Children's
Association/LICADD)

Absent:

Rachel Seiler (Community Development Corporation of LI)

Guest: Destiny Wise, Intern, Office of the Presiding Officer

1. **Minutes** A motion to accept the February minutes, made by Kathy Liguori, seconded by Ayesha Alleyne, passed unanimously.
2. **Statement by Leg. Tom Donnelly:** Chair Richard Koubek welcomed Leg. Tom Donnelly, Chair of the Education and Human Services Committee and Chair of the Public Safety Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature.
 - Leg. Donnelly thanked members of the Commission for their work, especially on critical issues related to Suffolk residents who are poor, such as affordable housing, supportive housing and public transportation.
 - Leg. Donnelly expressed some personal reservations about the Commission's report on immigration which was critical of certain police interactions with immigrants. Leg. Donnelly reported that as Chair of the Public Safety Committee he brought together legislators and top law enforcement officials to discuss police/community relations in immigrant communities as well as police interactions with immigrants. He is confident that Suffolk County Police Department (SCPD) officers are not stopping immigrants and asking them for their immigration documents. Mr. Koubek pointed out that the Commission knows that SCPD officers are not asking immigrants for their documents.

- Mr. Koubek also noted that the agency representatives who reported to the Commission stated that there is evidence of SCPD officers stopping immigrants for routine traffic violations which then can lead to ICE interactions, arrests and even deportations. Mr. Koubek stated that the Commission’s immigration report, based on testimony from agency representatives who serve undocumented immigrants, found that the Trump Administration’s anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies have caused immigrants to live in a constant state of fear that is preventing them from seeking services either for themselves or their children. He mentioned testimony from Carmen Maquilon of Catholic Charities who reported a decline in immigrant women reporting domestic violence situations and evidence that undocumented immigrant parents are not renewing Food Stamps for their citizen children. He stated that the Commission was told that certain SCPD practices are adding to this climate of fear.
 - Ayesha Alleyne asked about the roles SCPD School Resource Officers (SROs) play in high schools. Mr. Koubek referenced a *New York Times*/ProPublica report late in 2018 about an SRO in Huntington High School who allegedly used scant evidence to report a Huntington High School student to ICE which then led to his deportation. Leg. Donnelly responded that MS-13 gang violence is a serious problem in Suffolk which has impacted public schools. He noted that the media story did not give a full picture of what happened in Huntington High School and that he has heard from school officials that the SROs are highly regarded by students and staff. Mr. Koubek added that last year’s *Newsday*/ProPublica report on the alleged mistreatment of the parents of MS-13 victims added to the climate of uncertain immigrant/SCPD relations.
 - Leg. Donnelly stated that SCPD officials are working hard to improve their relations with immigrant communities. Luis Valenzuela and Mr. Koubek agreed that the SCPD leadership is addressing this situation, a point noted in the Commission’s immigration report. Mr. Valenzuela added that the policies and procedures established by the SCPD leadership may not be reaching some police officers on the beat.
 - Mr. Koubek and Leg. Donnelly agreed that the rhetoric and policies of the Trump Administration are exacerbating tensions between immigrants and the SCPD. Mr. Koubek noted, and Leg. Donnelly acknowledged, that Legislators Kara Hahn, Rob Calarco and Bridget Fleming – all members of the Public Safety Committee – are working with immigrant advocates to improve SCPD practices and their relations with the immigrant communities.
 - Leg. Donnelly offered to invite law-enforcement officials to meet with the Commission at a future date. Mr. Koubek thanked Leg. Donnelly for this opportunity. Leg. Donnelly provided the Commission with his cell phone number and invited members to contact him directly any time they have a concern. The Chair thanked Legislator Donnelly for taking time to address the Commission.
3. **Commission State Budget Agenda:** Based on a consensus reached at the February Commission meeting, Mr. Koubek shared a draft NYS advocacy letter that included:
1. The Child Care Commission’s budget asks;
 2. Additional funding for Suffolk bus service;
 3. Expansion of the Home Stability Support program that raises the DSS shelter allowance for homeless people to 85 % of the federal Fair Market Rental rate for each DSS district (Suffolk already has a version of this funding formula).

Mr. Koubek noted that Acting DSS Commissioner Dennis Nowak shared with the Commission his concern that the letter is quite late in the budget process. Mr. Koubek agreed but shared with the Commission a conversation he had with Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory who supported

the idea of the Commission sending a budget letter because its members represent a cross-section of agencies that have credibility due to the services they provide poor Suffolk residents. Several other Commission members agreed that the 2020 State budget asks should be discussed in the fall. Mr. Koubek stated that the Presiding Officer suggested the Commission's budget ask for transportation should be \$5 million, the same as the Long Island Lobby Coalition's ask and \$1 million more than the Suffolk Legislature's transportation ask. Mr. Koubek noted that Acting Public Works Commissioner Darnell Tyson had his staff draft possible applications of the \$5 million increase to the Suffolk bus system which would include expansion of evening and Sunday service. Mr. Valenzuela proposed that an additional item be added to the letter calling on the State not to make funding cuts to Medicaid. The letter was amended to include the Medicaid request. Ayesha Allene moved and Barbara Egloff seconded a motion to adopt the letter as amended. The motion was adopted: 11 Yes; 0 No; 2 Abstentions (Tracey Barns and Richard Krebs). The letter is appended below.

4. **Commission Goals:** Mr. Koubek provided the Commission with the draft 2019 goals discussed at the January and February meetings. Dr. Jeffrey Reynolds had suggested that the following goal be added to those already agreed to by consensus: *"In an era of significant need and scant funding, seek input from contract agencies about whether refinements to the contracting process could enhance program efficiency and further maximize the use of public dollars with more flexibility for agencies to make budget/staffing changes as program needs evolve throughout the year."* A discussion ensued about this goal and a consensus was reached to delete it from the formal Commission goals because several legislators are already looking into this matter as are other agencies such as the Health and Welfare Council of LI. It was agreed that the issue can be monitored by the Commission during 2019. Beth Zweig asked why the ADA had been removed as a goal. Mr. Koubek stated that the County and DSS have implemented an ADA policy and that the Commission's draft annual report indicates that this issue will be monitored in 2019. A motion to adopt the 2019 goals as amended, made by Kathy Liguori, seconded by Charles Fox, passed Yes 13; No 0, Abstentions 0.
5. **Commission Annual Report:** The Commission, having received the draft annual report to the Legislature in advance of the meeting, next reviewed the draft section by section. No amendments were offered. Kathy Liguori moved, and Ayesha Allene seconded a motion to adopt the report which passed: Yes 12; No 0; Abstentions 1 (D.J. Russo for Leg. Tom Donnelly).
6. **Child Care Update:** Kathy Liguori reported that another child care center closed in her area due to rising costs and low enrollments that result from parents' inability to afford the tuition. [Note: On March 17, 2019, *Newsday* published a major story on how parents and providers are struggling with high child care costs: <https://www.newsday.com/business/child-care-costs-squeezing-parents-1.28527064>]
7. **New DSS Commissioner:** Mr. Koubek reported that County Executive Bellone has offered the position of DSS Commissioner to Frances Pierre. Ms. Pierre is head of Help America which is the parent organization of Help Suffolk. Her appointment will be voted on by the Legislature, likely in April.
8. **Next Meeting:** Thursday, April 11

State Budget Letter

Gov. Andrew Cuomo
The State Capitol, Executive Chamber
Albany, New York 12224

March 14, 2019

Dear Governor Cuomo,

We write on behalf of the Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature to urge adoption of four appropriations in the 2019 New York State budget that will provide immeasurable assistance to poor and working poor Suffolk residents struggling with high child-care, transportation and housing costs. Suffolk County is among the highest cost-of-living regions in the United States. According to *BestPlaces.net*, in 2019, a salary of \$50,000 in New York, New York could decrease to \$32,824 in Long Island due to our County's high child-care, transportation and housing costs. According to the United Way ALICE report, the survival budget for a family with 2 young children is \$97,296 in Suffolk County. And, as the Commission reported in 2018, "the absence of permanent, safe and secure housing is the reason 56 percent of Long Islanders are paying more than the standard 30 percent of their incomes toward housing costs" and this shortage contributes to the 3,868 homeless people on Long Island *who, in Suffolk, cost \$19 million a year to shelter*.

For these reasons, we urge to you to incorporate into the 2019-201 New York State budget the following appropriations for Suffolk County:

Child-Care Funding

- **\$4 million for Facilitated Enrollment for Long Island:** The official Federal Poverty Level (FPL) for 2019 is \$25,100 for a family of four. Despite our high cost of living, eligibility for the child-care subsidy is currently at only 175% of the Federal Poverty Level in Suffolk County (\$43,925-for a family of 4). Yet in other parts of New York, eligibility for the child-care subsidy is at 200% of FPL (\$50,200 for a family of four) or even higher. The federal government recommends that the child-care subsidy be available to families earning at least 200% of FPL. The Facilitated Enrollment (FE) program will provide financial assistance to families up to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (\$75,300 for a family of 4), helping more families increase their earnings without losing critical child-care assistance.
 - **\$51 million for child-care subsidy Statewide:** New York State reaches less than 25% of children who are currently eligible for a child care subsidy. Many counties, such as Suffolk, have had to lower their child-care subsidy eligibility levels for working-poor families due to funding shortfalls. A \$51 million Statewide increase in the child-care subsidy would help Suffolk County reach all eligible families up to 200% of FPL and provide more families access to child care.
 - **Increase State funding to stabilize the child care workforce and infrastructure by reinstating the 75th percentile market rate formula for setting reimbursement rates:** The State is required to conduct a survey at least every two years to determine the rates being charged by child care providers. The goal is to reimburse subsidized programs at 75 percent of this rate. Currently, the State is operating on the 2016 Market Rates, and providing reimbursement below the 75th percentile leaving providers to manage increased costs (including minimum wage increases) without any additional funding.
 - **Fund the Long Island Pre-K Regional Technical Assistance Center (RTAC) at \$750,000 annually:** Only an estimated 10% of 4-year-olds on Long Island have access to a full-day state-funded Pre-K program. Contrast that with New York City, where virtually 100% of the 4-year old children have access to full-day Pre-K. Through professional development, technical expertise and a regional collaboration between school districts and community-based child care programs, the RTAC will provide a bridge to assist districts and early care and education partners to plan and develop a financially responsible system of care, and ensure delivery of high quality and accessible Pre-K.

\$5 million for the Suffolk Bus System

According to a ridership survey conducted in 2017, 59% of Suffolk County Transit County bus riders report a household income of less than \$25,000, which is close to the Federal Poverty Level. Nearly 25% of all riders have a household income of less than \$12,500. Suffolk County's bus service is funded at 35% from State funds and 50% from County funds. Yet, despite a higher County funding rate than other counties, Suffolk has consistently not received sufficient State funding to adequately operate its public bus system which is vitally important to poor and working-poor Suffolk residents. Only in recent years, for example, has Suffolk offered Sunday service, and even now, this service is available on just 13 of 42 bus lines. Service ends before 8:00 pm on 26 of Suffolk County Transit's 42 bus routes, and ends after 10PM on only 6 of 42 bus routes. There is no Suffolk County Transit bus service after 10:30 PM. This lack of Sunday and evening service is especially burdensome to working-poor residents who cannot afford their own automobile transportation. A \$5 million increase in the State's funding of Suffolk bus service will allow Suffolk to expand Sunday service to 25 lines while extending evening hours on most lines.

Home Stability Support Program

Despite a nationwide decline in homelessness, New York continues to annually break records. Across the State, an estimated 90,000 New Yorkers are homeless each night and more than 150,000 children experience homelessness over the course of a year. One significant factor in this crisis is the failure of the Public Assistance grant to even remotely enable families and individuals to afford decent housing. In Suffolk County, the rent allowance for three people is less than one third of the cost of a modest, but decent apartment in the county. The County does provide a supplement in limited types of cases, but only to families with children and only if there are no sanctions against the household. Home Stability Support (HSS) would provide a significant rent supplement to individuals and families who are homeless, face eviction, live in homes with hazardous conditions or victims of domestic violence. The supplement would enable them to pay rent up to 85% of the federally established Fair Market Rent for the region. We hope you will support a substantial down payment on HSS. In addition to helping to stabilize housing for low-income New Yorkers, it will significantly reduce the more than \$1 billion the state annually spends on emergency shelter.

Funding for Medicaid

New York State faces a potential \$1 billion cut in Medicaid finding. This would be disastrous for healthcare providers and the communities they serve, most of whom have concentrations of poor people. Hospitals and nursing homes that serve the most vulnerable populations would be significantly, negatively impacted. Essential healthcare workers could lose their jobs. Vital services including Emergency Rooms would be cut. We therefore urge you to oppose Medicaid reductions that will hurt our most vulnerable Suffolk neighbors.

For the health, safety and viability of our poor and working-poor neighbors, we urge you to include the above appropriations in the 2019-2020 New York State budget.

Respectfully submitted for the Commission,

Richard Koubek

Richard Koubek, PhD
Commission Chair

Kathy Liguori

Kathy Liguori
Commission Vice Chair

CC: Members of the Suffolk County Legislature
Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone

Senator Phil Boyle
Senator John Flanagan
Senator Jim Gaughran
Senator Kenneth LaValle
Senator Monica Martinez

Assemblyman Joseph DeStefano
Assemblyman Steve Englebright
Assemblyman Michael Fitzpatrick
Assemblyman Andrew Garbarino
Assemblywoman Kimberly Jean-Pierre
Assemblyman Michael LiPetri
Assemblyman Anthony Palumbo
Assemblyman Fred Thiele
Assemblyman Andrew Raia
Assemblyman Phil Ramos
Assemblyman Doug Smith
Assemblyman Steve Stern

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 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 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 TANF and Safety Net (SN) SWEP clients at Suffolk County Community College and Eastern Suffolk BOCES toward the goal of creating SCDSS and SCDOL “hub centers” for the delivery of multiple SWEP services, including work experience, education, training and child care.
3. Monitor 2019 federal budget impacts on 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. Create a scoring tool to measure supports provided to working-poor people by companies seeking a Suffolk County 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 the policy recommendations** contained in the Commission’s 2018 report to the Suffolk County Legislature on this topic including:
 - 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.

Deleted from 2018 goals:

~~Receive updates on the privatization of the County’s health centers under Hudson River Health Care and its impact on the provision of health care services in Suffolk County.~~

~~Invite the Suffolk County Department of Transportation to present to the Commission updates in County bus services and continue to monitor Suffolk bus service as it relates to the needs of poor and near poor people.~~

~~Explore strategies that encourage Suffolk County contract agencies to participate in the SWEP program and to accept SWEP clients.~~

~~Assess the implementation of the new Suffolk County “Americans with Disabilities Act” (ADA) policies and procedures at SCDSS, SCDOL and SCDOH.~~

~~Assess the impact of the substance abuse epidemic on communities/people of lower socioeconomic status with special attention to the effects on children and young people.~~

9. **Next Meeting:** The next meeting will be Thursday, March 14th.