

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

Minutes of the July 12, 2019 Meeting

Present:

Richard Koubek, Chair
Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair
Legislator Sammy Gonzalez
Ayesha Alleyne (Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corporation)
Traci Barnes (SCDSS)
Peggy Boyd (Family Service League)
Christina DeLisi (Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory)
Barbara Egloff (Eastern Suffolk BOCES)
Don Friedman (Empire Justice Center)
Kim Gierasch (Suffolk County Department of Health)
Michael Haynes (LI Cares/Harry Chapin Food Bank);
Arlene Jackson (Suffolk County Community College)
Richard Krebs, (SC Department of Labor)
Christian Limbach, (SC Association of Municipal Employees)
Frances Pierre, (Commissioner, SC Department of Social Services)
Dr. Jeffrey Reynolds (Family and Children's Association/LICADD)
Kathy Garneau for Michael Stoltz (Association for Mental Health and Wellness)
Beth Zweig, Nassau Suffolk Law Services

Excused)

Charles Fox (EOC-LI); Greta Guarton (LI Coalition for the Homeless); Luis Valenzuela (LI Council of Churches)

Absent:

Rachel Seiler (Community Development Corporation of LI)

1. **Minutes:** A motion to accept the July minutes, made by Christian Limbach, seconded by Ayesha Alleyne, passed unanimously.
2. **Introduction of Legislator Sam Gonzalez:** Chair Richard Koubek welcomed Leg. Sam Gonzalez, Chair of the Education and Human Services Committee. Mr. Koubek explained the mission of the Welfare to Work Commission which was established to advise the Legislature on issues related to people on public assistance and transitioning to work. He explained that over the years the Commission has also focused on societal issues that affect people leaving public assistance or people who are poor and may need public assistance. These issues have included child care, the lack of affordable housing, unregulated sober homes, federal immigration policies and supportive housing. He provided Legislator Gonzalez with copies of the Commission's study on poverty in Suffolk County as well as its child care, supportive housing and immigration reports. Legislator Gonzalez spoke of his pride in the communities he represents but also mentioned that his district has a number of the problems identified by the Commission including poverty, the lack of affordable housing, their need for affordable child care and the challenges posed by unregulated sober homes. He stated that he is very interested in the Commission's work and looks forward to participating in that work.
3. **Child Care:** Kathy Liguori reported that Governor Andrew Cuomo has created a State Affordable/Accessible Child Care Task Force. Jennifer Rojas, Executive Director of the Child Care

Council of Suffolk, is a member of the Task Force. She also reported that the NY State Regional Economic Development Council has now included child care as a possible local funding option. She noted that a subcommittee of the Long Island Regional Economic Development Council (LIREDC) is meeting over the summer to draft a proposal that would be submitted by the LIREDC to the State REDC for child-care funding. Mr. Koubek pointed out that Jennifer Rojas has agreed to present this plan to the Welfare to Work Commission once it has been submitted to the LIREDC. Ms. Liguori also reported that the Child Care Subcommittee of the LIREDC is encouraging local Industrial Development Agencies (IDAs) to ask what a business does to enhance local child care when assessing whether to offer an IDA tax break

4. **Welfare to Work IDA Scoring Tool:** Mr. Koubek distributed a copy of the IDA community benefits scoring tool developed several years ago by the Commission. The Commission again reviewed the benefits in the scoring tool that the Suffolk County IDA might consider when assessing an IDA application. Kathy Liguori suggested that another benefit be added: the LI Housing partnership's Employer Assisted Housing Program through which local businesses agree to assist employees who are first-time home buyers. The Commission consensus was to add this benefit to the scoring tool. Mr. Koubek again stated that the Commission's IDA Committee had met with the Suffolk County IDA staff in the spring of 2018 to present the scoring tool. IDA staff then passed it on to the IDA board and later suggested that a meeting be arranged with a board member and Commission members to discuss the tool. Mr. Koubek noted that Roger Clayman, Executive Director of the LI Federation of Labor, had agreed to arrange for a meeting with the two labor members of the IDA board: Kevin Harvey of IBEW 25 and Josh Slaughter of Laborer's Local 66. Legislator Gonzalez stated that he was very impressed with the scoring tool and he agreed to set up this meeting sometime in the summer or early September. Mr. Koubek noted that one hurdle would be that if the Suffolk County IDA used the scoring tool, other IDAs on Long Island (Nassau County and certain town IDAs) might encourage companies to avoid the Suffolk County IDA and apply instead to them for an IDA benefit. On the other hand, he pointed out that IDAs have come under community attack and have been criticized by State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli for too often not providing community benefits in return for their IDA grants and tax breaks. Thus, the scoring tool might help to improve public perceptions of the Suffolk County IDA.
5. **State Legislative Updates:**
 - a) **Green Light bill** granting undocumented immigrants the right to obtain a NYS driver's license - passed and has been signed into law by the Governor.
 - b) **Farm Workers' Rights bill** granting farm workers basic labor-law protections such as the right to join a union, receive the minimum wage and overtime pay- passed and has been signed into law by the Governor.
 - c) **Sanctions bill** that would grant public assistance client's certain notification rights and disability exemptions before sanctions are imposed - passed but awaits the Governor's signature.
 - d) **Home Stability Support bill** that would have expanded this program providing public assistance families with rent supplements up to 80 percent of the federal Fair Market Rental from NYC and Rochester to the entire State - did not pass. Mr. Koubek noted that, thanks to the advocacy efforts of former DSS Commissioner John O'Neill and his staff, Suffolk County has been granted a State OTDA rental supplement which brings the Suffolk shelter allowance to nearly 80 percent of the federal Fair Market Rental rate. Legislator Gonzalez asked if landlords act responsibly when renting to DSS clients. Traci Barnes stated that generally landlords abide by DSS rules and that it is very difficult securing affordable rental units in Suffolk's expensive housing market.

6. **SCCC/SWEP Pilot:** Mr. Koubek reported that he and Commission members Arlene Jackson, Richard Krebs, Michael Stoltz and Don Friedman met with SCC and DOL staff on June 19th to discuss the pilot.
 - a) Mr. Koubek stated that, thanks to the efforts of Tanya Velasquez at SCCC, there is now a point person at each campus to place SWEP clients in work assignments as they take college courses. As previously discussed at Commission meetings, the child-care leg of the pilot was not effective since the SCCC child care center closes in the summer and during college vacations which caused SWEP parents to choose their own child-care providers.
 - b) Mr. Koubek and Richard Krebs both reported that the pilot has likely reached its maximum enrollments for these reasons: the Suffolk labor market encourages SCCC Students to choose work over social services; many SWEP clients had problems in earlier school settings and would prefer work; it is sometimes difficult to match educational and work assignments at SCCC; federal TANF rules limit education as an acceptable participation assignment to only one year. Mr. Koubek stated that, despite federal limitations on educational activities, he and the other Commission members who attended the June 19th meeting believe that DOL staff are doing their utmost to enroll SWEP clients in educational settings. Currently there are about 80 clients out of approximately 2000 work-eligible DSS clients who are in educational/vocational settings of whom about 20 are at SCCC.
 - c) Mr. Koubek stated that he believes the 1996 welfare reform law was punitive in that it places heavy responsibilities on SWEP clients under the assumption that they are irresponsible and require close oversight and punishment for noncompliance. He said that the law is primarily designed to reduce public assistance enrollments and that it is not an anti-poverty program that moves poor people to economic self-sufficiency. For example, he noted that students in educational settings are required to provide a form signed by their instructors attesting to their attendance at every class session. He believes that some students may find this requirement embarrassing and demeaning. Richard Krebs and Traci Barnes countered that such rules foster a sense of responsibility. Don Friedman noted that failure to comply with rules such as attendance records can lead to sanctions. Ayesha Alleyne stated that her agency, Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corporation, has full time case managers who work with clients on developing behaviors that lead to self-sufficiency. She also stated that she has witnessed unfair DSS sanctions on occasion which discourage her clients. Richard Krebs countered that DOL and DSS are very careful before imposing a sanction. Mr. Koubek noted that the Commission is focusing on case management as a path out of poverty and stated his regrets that federal TANF funding does not provide for case management at DSS.
 - d) Barbara Egloff reported that Eastern Suffolk BOCES has a very successful program with Family Service League in which SWEP clients attend classes while fulfilling their work assignments.
 - e) Mr. Koubek suggested, and the Commission achieved consensus, that the pilot will continue as a DOL/SCCC program but that further Commission assessments are no longer necessary. He will draft a report on the pilot for the Presiding Officer.
7. **Announcements:** Mr. Krebs reported that the SCDOL summer youth program is working quite well with about 800 enrollments of youth ages 14-21.
8. **Next Meeting:** Thursday, September 12