

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

Minutes of the September 12, 2019 Meeting

Present:

Richard Koubek, Chair
Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair
Legislator Sam Gonzalez
Ayesha Alleyne (Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corporation)
Traci Barnes for Commissioner Frances Pierre (SCDSS)
Christina DeLisi (Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory)
Barbara Egloff (Eastern Suffolk BOCES)
Kim Gierasch (Suffolk County Department of Health)
Greta Guarton (LI Coalition for the Homeless);
Jeanne Durso for Arlene Jackson (Suffolk County Community College)
Eric Lopez for Richard Krebs, (SC Department of Labor)
Christian Limbach, (SC Association of Municipal Employees)
Michael Stoltz (Association for Mental Health and Wellness)
Luis Valenzuela (LI Council of Churches)
Beth Zweig, Nassau Suffolk Law Services

Excused)

Peggy Boyd (Family Service League); Charles Fox (EOC-LI); Don Friedman (Empire Justice Center); Michael Haynes (LI Cares/Harry Chapin Food Bank); Dr. Jeffrey Reynolds (Family and Children's Association/LICADD)

Absent:

Rachel Seiler (Community Development Corporation of LI)

1. **Minutes:** A motion to accept the July minutes, made by Kathy Liguori, seconded by Christian Limbach, passed unanimously. Chair Richard Koubek reminded the Commission that the August meeting had been cancelled due to two Commission committee meetings: the Supportive Housing Work Group and the IDA committee.
2. **SWEP/SCCC Pilot Report:** Copies of the draft report having been distributed to the Commission in advance of the September meeting, Mr. Koubek reminded the Commission that the pilot and report grew out of an August 2014 meeting with Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory who expressed his desire that more SWEP clients be placed in educational settings so as to put them on a path to self-sufficiency. This has been a goal of the Commission since its inception in 2003.
 - a. Mr. Koubek stated that the report documents how the pilot increased by 66% the number of SWEP clients participating in SCCC courses, however there were a number of systemic barriers to education and training that inhibited even more student placements. Paramount among these were the federal government's "work first" welfare regulations that permit only one year of education and training. The current low unemployment rate on Long Island also has been a deterrent because clients would prefer a paid work assignment – even at a low wage – to an educational assignment. Child care at the college was also problematic because SWEP clients prefer to arrange their own child care because the college child-care centers are

- closed during the summer and SCCC vacation weeks. Other barriers to education are also documented in the report.
- b. Mr. Koubek noted that while the report does show a 66 percent increase in SCCC placements, the Commission had hoped for even higher numbers. The report also documents improved communication and collaboration between SCCC and the Suffolk County Department of Labor (SCDOL) as well as the SCDOL's commitment to educational placements, despite the federal regulations that create barriers to these placements. Nevertheless, education for SWEP clients remains a priority for the Commission, for the Suffolk County Department of Labor and for SCCC. Eric Lopez of SCDOL stated that there are already 17 SWEP clients with SCCC placements for this academic year, with more expected. The Commission will continue to encourage and monitor educational placements for SWEP clients
 - c. Barbara Egloff of Eastern Suffolk BOCES addressed the portion of the report that describes the Career Pathway Program, a collaborative project with Family Service League that has similar goals as the Commission's SWEP/SCCC pilot. She noted that the Child Care Council of Suffolk assists participating SWEP clients in finding child care. The Career Pathways Program prepares SWEP clients to complete their High School Equivalency Diploma while also preparing them for career skills through contextualized and work-based learning experiences. Participants develop computer literacy skills, learn appropriate work habits and safety protocols as well as job skills aligned with hospitality; facilities maintenance; business, and/or healthcare career paths. Participants also have the opportunity to dual enroll in one of Eastern Suffolk BOCES Vocational Training courses aligned with one of these career paths. The program had 46 SWEP participants in the 2018-2019 academic year.
 - d. With no changes suggested in the report, Kathy Liguori moved and Ayesha Aleyne seconded a motion to adopt the report which passed: Yes -14; No - 0; Abstentions – 1 (Jeanne Durso)
3. **IDA Scoring Tool:** Mr. Koubek reported that Legislator Sam Gonzalez hosted a meeting on August 6th to discuss the Commission's IDA community-benefits scoring tool attended by him and Kathy Liguori as well as representatives of two community groups that helped draft the scoring tool: Roger Clayman, Executive Director of the Long Island Federation of Labor and Anita Halasz, Executive Director of Long Island Jobs with Justice. Also in attendance were two IDA board members who represent labor: Kevin Harvey of IBEW 25 and Josh Slaughter of the Laborer's Union. Both IDA board members were impressed with the tool and agreed that it should be brought before the full IDA board for their consideration. Mr. Harvey noted that several of the scoring tool components are already being used to assess IDA applicants. Leg. Gonzalez said he would follow up with the IDA board to determine if the scoring tool will be paced on the board's agenda.
4. **Supportive Housing Work Group:** Mr. Koubek stated that the Work Group reconvened on August 8th as a follow-up to the Commission's report on supportive housing and to a presentation at the June Welfare to Work Commission by AnnMarie Csorny of the Suffolk County Department of Health Community Mental Hygiene Services. At the June Commission meeting, there was discussion about the need for greater coordination between SPA and provider/referral agencies with regard to the submission of SPA applications. The August 8th meeting had these highlights:
- a. Michael Giuffrida, Associate Director of the Long Island Coalition for the Homeless, reported that SPA and the Continuum of Care (CoC) representatives have been meeting for two years to improve coordination between SPA and provider/referral

agencies. He stated that there are overlapping referral systems that do not always communicate with one another. This creates gaps in understanding as to which clients have active applications, especially when clients' applications are submitted to SPA by several agencies over extended periods of time. These communications issues are compounded by the multiple problems faced by chronically homeless individuals, especially those living in the streets. Mr. Giuffrida stated that SPA staff are overextended but that CoC provider/referral agencies are developing a monthly spread sheet of COC clients seeking housing which is sent to SPA. He stated that efforts are being made to improve interagency access to computer data.

- b. Those present at the August 8th meeting agreed that the CoC and SPA are working to resolve communications barriers and that the Welfare to Work Commission's Supportive Housing Work group should not become involved in this process.
 - c. Peggy Boyd and Mike Stoltz noted that their agencies have a joint grant to expedite SPA applications submitted by shelters. It was agreed that the Commission should receive an update on the outcomes of this project.
5. **Child Care:** Kathy Liguori reported that child-care providers were notified by the NYS Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) in early September that, effective September 16th, all new hires must undergo federal and state criminal background checks before they can begin working with children. Since these checks take about five weeks, providers are in the untenable position of not allowing new hires to begin work until they have been cleared.
- a. This five-week delay may cause some providers to turn families away from care if they do not have a sufficient number of employees whose background checks have been completed. Mr. Liguori further stated that child-care providers already perform State fingerprinting criminal background checks and State Central Registry (child abuse) clearances. Employees are not allowed to be alone with children until their clearances are received. These Federal FBI criminal background and National State Center Registry for Child Abuse clearances are new and in addition to the current required State clearances.
 - b. Ms. Liguori stated that, while all agree on the importance of background checks, the short-lead in period for implementation is extremely burdensome. She reported that the Suffolk County Child Care Commission is addressing this serious problem with the assistance of Jennifer Rojas, one of its members who is also the Executive Director of the Child Care Council of Suffolk as well as a member of the Governor's child care task force. Mr. Koubek pointed out that the Welfare to Work Commission's child care report, issued in 2014, referenced the new federal safety guidelines that would negatively impact child-care providers since there was no federal funds provided to implement these guidelines. Ms. Liguori expressed disappointment that OCFS, having known of the impending background-check requirements since 2014, and having known that the NYS application for a waiver from the regulation reached its limit in April, 2019, gave the providers only two weeks to comply.
 - c. Leg. Gonzalez reported that he is working with the Child Care Commission and State officials to get OCFS to provide a three to six-month lead-in period for the implementation of these regulations. Mike Stoltz and Traci Barnes said that these background-check requirements apply to other agencies as well and that it would be very helpful if Legislator Gonzalez could create a prototype that lessens the implementation burdens on agencies.

6. State Legislative Updates:

- a. **Sanctions bill** that would grant public assistance client's certain notification rights and disability exemptions before sanctions are imposed - passed but still awaits the Governor's signature.
 - b. **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. Advocates are working to revive the bill in 2020.
7. **Barriers to Self Sufficiency:** This agenda item was tabled for the October meeting.
 8. **Announcements:** Mike Stoltz announced that national mental health week will be observed in October.
 9. **Next Meeting:** Thursday, October 10