

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

**Minutes of the October 10, 2019 Meeting**

**Present:**

Richard Koubek, Chair  
Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair  
Legislator Sam Gonzalez  
Ayesha Alleyne (Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corporation)  
Peggy Boyd (Family Service League)  
Don Friedman (Empire Justice Center)  
Christina DeLisi (Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory)  
Charles Fox (EOC-LI);  
Kim Gierasch (Suffolk County Department of Health)  
Greta Guarton (LI Coalition for the Homeless);  
Michael Haynes (LI Cares/Harry Chapin Food Bank);  
Arlene Jackson (Suffolk County Community College)  
Richard Krebs, (SC Department of Labor)  
Traci Barnes for Commissioner Frances Pierre (SCDSS)  
Donna Teichner for Dr. Jeffrey Reynolds (Family and Children's Association/LICADD)  
Luis Valenzuela (LI Council of Churches)

**Excused)**

Barbara Egloff (Eastern Suffolk BOCES); Christian Limbach, (SC Association of Municipal Employees); Michael Stoltz (Association for Mental Health and Wellness); Beth Zweig, Nassau Suffolk Law Services

**Absent:**

Rachel Seiler (Community Development Corporation of LI)

1. **Minutes:** A motion to accept the September minutes, made by Christina DeLisi, seconded by Luis Valenzuela, passed unanimously.
2. **2019 Commission Goal on Self Sufficiency:** The Commission engaged in a lengthy discussion on strategies for pursuing these aspects of its 2019 goal to explore paths to self-sufficiency for people on public assistance:
  - a. **Creating a clearing house of in-demand jobs that pay self-sufficiency wages:** Richard Krebs stated that his DOL staff is working to compile a list of the most in-demand Suffolk County jobs.
  - b. **Mental health services available to social-services clients:** Don Friedman again reported that OTDA has developed a "modified mini assessment tool" to screen Public-Assistance applicants for mental illness. However, the tool was only recommended by OTDA and is not widely utilized. Traci Barnes stated that she will review SCDSS practices with regard to mental-health screening and report back to the Commission in November. Don Friedman agreed to research the outcomes of the OTDA "modified mini assessment tool" in those districts that are using the tool. A number of Commission members noted that the OTDA self-declaration question regarding mental illness is problematic because some clients have undiagnosed mental illness such as sub-clinical depression and don't know that they suffer from mental illness while others do not self-declare for fear that it might impede their

receiving benefits or because of the stigma attached to mental illness. Chair Richard Koubek stated that the Commission has been working on developing a more sophisticated screening tool for over ten years. The problem is that, as Mike Stoltz pointed out in the Supportive Housing Work Group, it takes many hours to adequately assess an individual's mental health. One tool suggested by the Commission in the past was found to be too long and complicated. Peggy Boyd and Greta Guarton noted that the difficulties screening mental illness for Public-Assistance clients are very similar to the challenges faced when screening homeless people for supportive housing and emergency shelter. Mr. Koubek, Mr. Friedman and Mr. Krebs each noted that failure to diagnose mental illness in Public Assistance clients can lead to sanctions when their untreated illness interferes with their ability to meet DSS or DOL requirements and regulations. There was consensus that, following the DSS report on current practices for mental-health screening at the November meeting, the Commission might form a committee to again explore this complex issue.

- c. **The role of case management:** There was unanimous agreement that case management plays a critical role in helping poor people attain self-sufficiency. The core problem is that case management programs are expensive and there is limited government funding for such programs. Don Friedman stated that case management can take many forms, from simple life coaching to more complex types of psychological counseling. Ayesha Alleyne described the weekly life-coaching case management used by Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corporation. Greta Guarton and Donna Teicher described some of the case management models used in programs that are more-medically/psychologically oriented. Some of these case-management programs are funded by the NYS Departments of Mental Health and OTDA. It was agreed that the December Commission meeting will hear reports from Ms. Alleyne, Ms. Teichner and Ms. Boyd describing the case management models used in their programs. Mr. Koubek will ask Mike Stoltz to also participate in this December report-back. One question left unanswered is whether the Commission should hold a public hearing to showcase successful case management programs, as suggested by Mr. Koubek and Kathy Liguori, or use some other vehicle for educating the Legislature and the public about the benefits of case management in helping people achieve self-sufficiency.
3. **SWEP/SCCC Pilot Report:** Mr. Koubek reported that the Commission will be presenting the SWEP/SCCC report to the Education and Human Services Committee at 12 Noon on November 19<sup>th</sup> in the Hauppauge legislative auditorium.
4. **IDA Scoring Tool:** Legislator Gonzalez reported that he is working with IDA board member Josh Slaughter on whether the Commission can be placed on the IDA board's agenda to discuss the scoring tool.
5. **DSS/DOL/DOH Staffing:** Ms. Barnes, Mr. Krebs, and Kim Gierasch each reported that the proposed 2020 County Executive's budget provides adequate staffing for their respective departments, DOL, DSS and DOH. Mr. Krebs and Ms. Barnes added that salaries are quite low and that it is increasingly difficult to recruit staff in Suffolk's current, competitive labor market. Mr. Koubek stated that he will check the Budget Review Office's report on the proposed budget, due in a few weeks, and report to the Commission if BRO identifies staffing problems at DSS/DOL/DOH. An electronic vote may be necessary if problems are identified since the Legislature's vote on the budget precedes the next Commission meeting.

6. **Child Care:** Kathy Liguori reported that child-care providers remain extremely challenged as they are forced to implement the federal background checks now required by NYS OCFS with only 3 weeks written notice.
7. **Public Charge Regulations:** Mr. Koubek announced that the new federal public-charge regulations are due to go into effect on October 15<sup>th</sup>. These regulations would make a legal immigrant's use of a public benefit such as Food Stamps grounds for not having their legal status renewed. This issue was included in the Commission's 2018 report to the Legislature on the impacts that federal immigration policies are having on Suffolk residents. Mr. Koubek will be joining a conference call on the public charge regulations the afternoon of October 10<sup>th</sup>. He has invited Empire Justice's Cheryl Keshner to explain the details of the new regulations to the Commission at the November meeting.
8. **Announcements:** Mr. Koubek announced that Charles Fox is leaving EOC and will no longer serve on the Commission. He thanked Mr. Fox for his service. All wished him well in his new position at Suffolk County Legal Aid.
9. **Next Meeting:** Thursday, November 14th