

Suffolk County Legislature

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WELFARE TO WORK COMMISSION
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March 12, 2020

To: Members of the Suffolk County Legislature:

The Welfare to Work Commission is pleased to provide you with our annual report of 2019 Commission activities as well as our 2020 Commission goals. As you can see in the attached report, the Commission was again very active in 2019, 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 Suffolk County DSS, DOL and DOH.
 - b. Supporting Suffolk County bus service.
 - c. Create a tool to score community benefits offered by IDA applicants.
2. Exploring barrier and paths to self-sufficiency for poor people in Suffolk County
3. 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 and Eastern Suffolk BOCES.
4. Exploring supportive-housing options for people with mental illness.
5. Assessing the impact of federal immigration policies on Suffolk residents.
6. Assessing funding for child-care services in Suffolk County.

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

Ayesha Alleyne

Ayesha Alleyne, Vice Chair



Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature

Annual Report of 2019 Activities And 2020 Goals

March 12, 2020

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 2020 and a summary of its activities for 2019.

Welfare to Work Commission's 2020 Goals

1. Update the Commission's 2012 report, "Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County" with current poverty statistics and assess the feasibility of conducting public hearings on barriers to self-sufficiency and paths out of poverty including:
 - 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. Assess on-site educational and work placements 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.
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 monitor Single Point of Access (SPA) housing placements for Suffolk residents suffering from mental illness.
9. Continue to assess the impact of federal immigration policies on Suffolk County.

Activities Pursuant to the Commission’s 2019 Goals

Barriers and Paths to Self Sufficiency

During 2019, the Commission again addressed its 2012 report, “Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County,” this year in the context of exploring barriers to economic self-sufficiency and paths out of poverty for Suffolk County residents.

1. ***Identifying In-Demand Jobs that Pay Self-Sufficiency Wages:*** The Commission received from the Suffolk County Department of Labor the New York State “Long Term Employment Projections, 2016-2026” which can be used to frame future assessments of SWEP job placements.
2. ***Mental Health Services:*** At its November meeting the Commission explored mental-health options for SWEP clients. Vincent Rothaar, Director of Policies and Procedures for Suffolk County Department of Social Services (DSS) stated that DSS interviews every Temporary Assistance applicant for the purpose of detecting barriers to employment which might include alcohol and substance abuse, learning and educational deficiencies, criminal backgrounds as well as mental-health problems. The intake workers use an OTDA approved employment assessment tool to identify barriers during the 30-45-minute interview. Applicants with perceived or possible mental-health problems are referred to Industrial Medicine Associates (IMA) for more thorough diagnoses. Similarly, clients seeking DSS housing are assessed for barriers including mental-health problems, alcohol and substance abuse that might prevent them from being housed in a DSS facility because they may not be able to comply with DSS housing rules and regulations. DSS will continue to provide emergency housing to individuals whose non-compliance was directly related to a mental health, medical or substance abuse impairment.
3. ***OTDA Modified Mini Mental Health Screening Tool:*** Don Friedman of the Empire Justice Center shared with the Commission a three-page mental-health screening tool known as the Modified Mini Screen, which was validated by academic researchers in 2013, and recommended by the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) for use by local DSSs.

The tool is optional for local DSS districts. The ability of the screen to assess the likelihood that a person has a mental illness could help DSS to understand limitations in a client's ability to comply with program requirements, and thereby avoid adverse actions such as sanctions. Mr. Friedman also emphasized that the-intake screening at DSS should do more than evaluate for employability, but should examine the person's capacities with regard to all interactions with DSS. The Commission will explore application of this OTDA tool and other mental-health screening resources in 2020.

4. **Case Management.** At its December meeting, the Commission heard presentations on case-management models used by Family and Children's Association, Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corporation, Association for Mental Health and Wellness, Family Service League of LI and the Long Island Coalition for the Homeless. Case management is a collaborative process in which trained professionals plan, implement, coordinate, monitor and evaluate options and services required to meet clients' health and human-service's needs. It is characterized by advocacy, communication and resource management that promote quality and cost-effective interventions and outcomes for each client. The Commission reached consensus that case management can be very effective in addressing clients' individual health, educational, housing and other needs, thereby providing them with a path to self-sufficiency. However, case management requires funding streams. It was noted that the Departments of Social Services and Labor are primarily charged by federal and State statutes and regulations with determining clients' eligibility for departmental services and benefits as well as monitoring their compliance with departmental regulations such as work requirements, education and training assignments and assigned substance-abuse treatment programs. Case management services are provided to Temporary Assistance individuals and families in emergency housing. Additionally, DSS refers all eligible individuals to Health Homes. Health Homes offer comprehensive care management to individuals who are enrolled in Medicaid and have two qualifying chronic conditions. The Commission will continue to assess case management in 2020
5. **Financial literacy.** This goal was not addressed in 2019 but may be carried over into 2020.

Education and Training Opportunities for SWEP Clients

The SCCC/SWEP Pilot: In keeping with its 2012 poverty report calling for greater opportunities for SWEP clients to receive education and training, the Commission conducted a thorough 2019 assessment of its pilot to create 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. The goal of this pilot was to create DSS and DOL "hub centers" for the delivery of multiple SWEP services, including work experience, education, training and child care, particularly at Suffolk County Community College (SCCC). Since its creation in 2015, 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. The Commission prepared a report on the pilot which was presented to the Legislature’s Education and Human Services Committee in November, 2019. The Commission will continue to assess in 2020 DSS and DOL placements of SWEP clients at SCCC and Eastern Suffolk BOCES for education and work experiences.

Staffing Levels at DSS, DOL, DOH

The Commission’s 2012 poverty report highlighted the need for appropriate staffing at the Suffolk County Departments of Social Services (DSS), Labor (DOL) and Health (DOH). Following release of County Executive Bellone’s 2020 Proposed Budget, the Commission received reports from its DSS, DOL and DOH representatives that the staffing recommendations in the County Executive’s 2020 budget proposals were adequate.

IDA Community Benefits Scoring Tool

In pursuit of its 2012 poverty report recommendation encouraging Suffolk Industrial Development Agencies (IDAs) to award tax incentives to companies that “hire local workers and pay...family-sustaining wages,” the Commission continued to work on adoption of its proposed scoring tool to measure supports for working-poor people and other community benefits provided by companies seeking a Suffolk County Industrial Development Agency benefit. Legislator Sam Gonzalez hosted a meeting on August 6th to discuss the Commission’s IDA community-benefits scoring tool which was attended by Commission members Richard Koubek and Kathy Liguori as well as representatives of two community groups that helped draft the IDA 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 Suffolk 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 there was consensus 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 is following up with the IDA Board to determine if the scoring tool will be placed on the Board’s agenda. This issue will be carried into 2020.

Suffolk County Bus System

As part of its on-going assessment of Suffolk public bus service for working-poor people, another recommendation in its 2012 poverty report, the Commission consulted with Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory and wrote a letter to Governor Andrew Cuomo and

State legislators supporting the Suffolk County Legislature's call for a \$5 million increase in State funding for Suffolk bus service. The letter drew from information in a December 2018 presentation to the Commission on Suffolk bus service provided by Darnell Tyson, Deputy Commissioner of the Transportation Division of the Suffolk County Department of Public Works. The Commission's letter pointed out that, 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 high County bus-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. Weekdays, 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 would have allowed Suffolk to expand Sunday service to 25 lines while extending evening hours on most lines. While the \$5 million dollar increase was not secured, there was an increase in State funding of \$2 million for Suffolk bus service in 2019 which was used to expand its bus system, including adding buses on one of its busiest lines, launching a new route along Route 109, and creating an on-demand ride-sharing service on the East End..

Child Care

1. **Government Child-Care Funding:** Jennifer Rojas, Executive Director of the Child Care Council of Suffolk, provided an extensive report to the Commission at its November meeting on federal and State funding for child care. She is a member of the new Governor's State Task Force on Child-Care Availability which recommended an increase in State funding for the 2020 budget. The goal was to secure \$100 million in State funding: \$40 million for the Workforce Stability Fund and \$60 million for the child-care subsidy for families earning under \$200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Unfortunately, child care was not increased in the Governor's proposed 2020 State budget.
2. **Child Care and the NYSREDC:** Ms. Rojas also reported at the Commission's November meeting that the New York State Regional Economic Development Council (NYSREDC), which awards State-wide \$750 million in competitive grants to local councils, including the Long Island Regional Economic Development Council (LIREDC), has now included child care as a local funding priority. This led to the LIREDC creating a Long Island Child-Care Task Force that is developing a proposal to use LIREDC funds to supplement State budget allocations so that no Long Island family pays more than 10 percent of its income for child care (which is the federally recommended formula).
3. **Background Checks:** The Commission learned in September 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 were in the untenable position of not allowing new hires to begin work until they have been cleared. This five-week delay may cause some providers to turn families away from child care if they do not have a sufficient number of employees whose background checks have been completed. The Commission was disappointed 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' notice to comply.

Supportive Housing – Coordinating SPA Applications

1. ***Wait List for SPA Housing:*** The Commission presented its comprehensive report on supportive housing to the Legislature's Education and Human Services Committee meeting on May 7th, 2019. In June, AnnMarie Csorny, Director, Suffolk County Department of Health, Division of Community Mental Hygiene Services, who oversees the Single Point of Access (SPA) housing program in Suffolk County for people with mental illness, provided an update on SPA housing. Ms. Csorny noted that the majority of State funds for supportive housing go to New York City despite the fact that Suffolk County is the fourth largest county in New York State. The Commission's report on supportive housing expressed concerns about the wait list for SPA housing services. Ms. Csorny stated that on average the SPA office has approximately 260 applications for all levels of housing for persons with mental illness who are homeless. It is estimated that each person with an active SPA application who is homeless is contacted and offered a placement minimally bi-monthly. Vacancies for all levels of housing range from 10 to 15 per week, with an average monthly total of 54. The SPA office estimates that they outreach to about 8 persons per vacancy.
2. ***Coordination of the Spa Application Process:*** One concern expressed during Ms. Csorny's presentation to the Commission was that homeless clients with mental illness are served by several agencies, each of which deals with a different aspect of the client's application. Ms. Csorny suggested a pilot project to improve coordination of the application process among different agencies. The Commission's Supportive Housing Work Group reconvened on August 8th as a follow-up to the presentation by Ms. Csorny to discuss the need for greater coordination between SPA and provider/referral agencies with regard to the submission of SPA applications. 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. These communication issues are compounded by the multiple problems faced by chronically-homeless mentally-ill 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. 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 communications process. The Commission will continue to assess SPA placements in 2020

Immigration – Proposed Changes in Public Charge Regulations

Continuing its assessment of the impact that federal immigration laws and policies are having on Suffolk County, in October, the Commission was scheduled to take up a new federal Public Charge policy. The proposed Public Charge regulations would add to the criteria used to determine if a documented immigrant might become a Public Charge their use of Food Stamps, public or Section 8 housing and emergency Medicaid for anyone over the age of 21. Going forward, use of these programs could be factored into the assessment that an immigrant might be a Public Charge, that is, not self-sufficient and dependent on public benefits, and therefore a determination might be made not to offer that immigrant Legal Permanent Status (Green Card.) However, since three federal district court injunctions were issued in October barring implementation of the new Public Charge regulations, the Commission tabled the issue pending a ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2020. In January, 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the federal government could begin implementation of the new Public Charge regulations, which began on February 24th. The Commission will monitor impacts of these new regulations throughout 2020.

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, DSS, DOL and DOH in 2020 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:

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Legislator Sarah Anker, Chair, Senior and Human Services Committee

Peggy Boyd, Family Service League
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Barbara Egloff, Eastern Suffolk BOCES
Don Friedman, Empire Justice Center
Kimberly Gierasch, Suffolk County Department of Health
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Michael Haynes, Long Island Cares/The Harry Chapin Food Bank
Arlene Jackson, Suffolk County Community College
Eric Lopez, Suffolk County Department of Labor, Licensing and Consumer Affairs
Christian Limbach, Suffolk County Association of Municipal Employees
Frances Pierre, 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
Jose Veliz, EOC of Suffolk County
Beth Zweig, Nassau/Suffolk Law Services