

**EDUCATION & HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE**  
**OF THE**  
**SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE**  
**MINUTES**

A meeting of the Education & Human Services Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Maxine Postal Legislative Auditorium of the Evans K. Griffing Building, 300 Center Drive, Riverhead, New York on August 30, 2016.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Legislator Monica Martinez - Chairperson  
Legislator Thomas F. Barraga - Vice Chair  
Legislator Kate Browning  
Legislator Robert Calarco, DPO  
Legislator Kara Hahn  
Legislator Leslie Kennedy

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

George M. Nolan - Counsel to the Legislature  
Amy Ellis - Chief Deputy Clerk/Legislature  
Lora Gellerstein - Chief of Staff/Legislature  
Jill Moss - Budget Review Office  
Ben Zwirn - Suffolk Community College  
Kevin Peterman - Suffolk Community College  
Katie Horst - County Executive's Office  
John Marafino - County Executive's Office  
Lisa Pinkard - Aide to Legislator Martinez  
Justin Littell - Aide to Legislator D'Amaro  
Seth Squicciarino - Aide to Legislator Hahn  
Ali Nazir - Aide to Legislator Kennedy  
Michael Pitcher - Director of Communications/PO  
Dave Schwartz - Newsday  
Nancy Mariano - Regional Director/Friends of Karen  
Gemma Deleon-Lopresti - Appointee/Suffolk County Community College Board of Trustees  
And all other interested parties

**MINUTES TAKEN BY:**

Diana Flesher - Court Stenographer

**MINUTES TRANSCRIBED BY:**

Kim Castiglione - Legislative Secretary

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THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 12:34 PM

**CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:**

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen and welcome to today's Education and Human Services meeting. If we can have all the Legislators to the horseshoe. And we will begin with the Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator Kara Hahn.

**SALUTATION**

Thank you. Again, welcome. Today we have a presentation by Friends of Karen, but before that, Madam Clerk, do we have any cards today?

**MS. ELLIS:**

No, we do not.

**CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:**

Thank you. Anyone in the audience that would like to speak to the committee? Seeing none, Madam Clerk, we'll move on to our presentation. And we have Nancy Mariano, the Regional Director of Friends of Karen.

**MS. MARIANO:**

Hi. I have seen many of you very recently when I did a presentation and, Monica, thank you so much for inviting me. I'm going to gear this presentation more towards the education part of Friends of Karen, because a lot of times people when they hear about Friends of Karen - they don't even know about that component. But before I get started with that, I'd like to share a very short video called More Time to Love.

*Video Presentation*

**MS. MARIANO:**

First I want you to know that this film took about eight months to produce and Friends of Karen didn't pay for a dime for it. We try very hard not to spend money on things like that. We had it underwritten and 83 cents of the dollar that we raise for our four and a half million dollar budget is fundraised. We raise our money and make sure that these kind of things, which are important, but don't take the money away from the services we provide.

Friends of Karen has been around for 38 years and still we're probably the most kept secret around, which is frustrating to us, and it's very frustrating right now as September first becomes Childhood Cancer Awareness Month. Many of you have gotten an e-mail from us with just a small paragraph about Childhood Cancer Awareness Month and how Friends of Karen is there. We send it to you in English and Spanish, and one of the best services that you could provide for all the constituents in Suffolk County is to get this one pager out in your community. Let people know that we are there. You know, sometimes we feel like we have to twist people's arms to call us. Maybe it's because some of the families are too proud to ask for help, or maybe because they don't hear of us right away.

We have children in 26 hospitals, and when a child is diagnosed and they hear those horrible words *your child has cancer*, they also hear *call Friends of Karen*, but they don't hear that right then and there. They know they have to go home and tell the other sisters and brothers and grandma and everybody else and they're not thinking about how are we going to go forward? How are we going to pay the bills? Who is going to take care of the other children? They're not thinking about that. What they're thinking is how could this have happened to us?

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So that's where Friends of Karen comes in. When they are in the hospital eventually they will call Friends of Karen and they will be assigned one of our social workers, and also a sibling support specialist. We will stay with that family for as long as they need us, hopefully just through treatment and hopefully the treatment works.

Cancer is usually a two to three year process, and unless the people get organized in this process, the family is going to fall apart. Without Friends of Karen almost 84% of families get divorced. Every new family gets what we call a Go Bag, again donated, and everything inside of it, except for the stamps. We haven't figured that out. Go Bag meaning get organized. Things like a notebook. Write down every single thing you learn about your disease. If you get a rash from Tylenol write it down, so six weeks from now when the same thing happens you don't panic.

We teach the family every step of the way for that whole long process of how to handle this difficult journey. They have to be navigated through this journey. We educate them, we advise them. In this here bag there's Dunkin' Donut coupons, there's stamps to send the bills to us so we can pay them. We do not give the family the money. We pay the bills directly to the mortgage company, the car payment, the drug company.

When a family is diagnosed with this, one parent, if there are two parents, is going to have to stop working. They're going to have to make that decision. Our social workers, with a lot of tough love, will get them on the right path and stay with them to go forward. No parent should ever make a decision, and it happens all the time before Friends of Karen, of thinking they're going food shopping and they just opened the mail and they have a \$400 co-payment. That's a horrible decision to make when they're trying to save their child's life. So that doesn't happen anymore with Friends of Karen when Friends of Karen is involved.

It's so important for us to make sure that the families understand that the sisters and brothers are as affected, as you saw in that film, as the sick child. That little boy said I thought cancer was catching. He never went in his brother's room because he thought he could catch the disease. And what happens when a child is diagnosed, everybody stops talking. Nobody's talking about cancer. Our social workers will change that in the family. Most of the time when we first go see a family the family is saying I don't want you to tell the other kids that he has cancer and -- which is so wrong because they're going to hear about it. They're going to hear about it on the playground, in school, the neighbors, they're going to hear about it. And we found out that the more education they have about the disease, how it's going to be handled, it's not as scary.

We have a doll. It's a very expensive doll and it opens up -- it's a \$1500 doll. And it opens up and shows every body part. It shows the broviac, which is a tube that goes into the arteries. It shows where that's connected. It shows everything that's happening to the sick brother or sister so it's not so frightening. They're talking about it. We have dolls that have hair and then the hair comes off for the younger kids, so now they have a playmate that looks like them.

The whole process from the day of diagnosis through treatment is to make this process not as scary, to know that they have somebody that will hold their hand throughout the whole thing, and hopefully when they're cured and this is just a memory that goes away. And we will stay with that family, we'll stay with the siblings for as long as they need us.

Bereavement. You know, we hate to talk about that. We helped 1679 kids last year; we lost 72. Those families never want to go away. The ones that do well, they want to forget about Friends of Karen. We're part of the bad dream that they had, bad dream. But the ones that lost a child, they want to stay with us. They want to stay with the social workers. They know we were there. They know that we will care about them forever. We now have bereavement support, not everywhere, we're working on it, in bilingual for the Spanish. Because one of the worst things that could happen

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is the children all speak English, not all the parents do. When the child is diagnosed, more times than you could ever imagine, they're in the hospital, mom with the child, and the child has to tell the mom what the doctor is saying. That's horrible. So we now have hired more bilingual people. For bereavement we have -- we just received a grant that just works with our Hispanic families that work with the families that have lost a child. There is nothing worse than losing a child, and we will give so much attention to that for as long as they need it.

I just want to make sure I didn't forget anything really, really important. We started a program called Beth's Buddies. B-E-T-H. She was the President of the board and when she retired we named a program after her. She was an educator, and she also retired from education. And we have volunteers that work directly with the siblings and go into their homes and help them with their homework. The sick children get through the school systems whatever they need, but not the siblings, and mom and dad aren't there to go over spelling tests and things like that, so now we even put that program in.

I'm keeping this sort of geared just towards education. I'm speaking at the Health Committee. A lot of you are going to be bored because -- you can see the film again and I'll talk more about the medical ends and the research that we're involved with and everything else at that point. But I can't thank you enough for your past support and I just want to say, because sometimes it does come about dollars and cents, we raise our own budget but the Board of Directors has recently voted that we will never turn a qualified family away.

So with that being said, none of us sleep at night because, you know, where are we going to get this money to help. We used to get funding from the County. The last funding we got was in 2011. It started in 2005. And if there's any way to get back into that process that would be wonderful. I would have to have someone help me with that because I don't even know where to begin.

But I thank you always. I've met with so many of you face to face and I thank you for caring about our beautiful, precious children and their families. Thank you so much. Does anyone have any questions?

**CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:**

Are there any questions?

**LEG. BROWNING:**

I do.

**CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:**

Legislator Browning.

**LEG. BROWNING:**

I know you guys helped little Joey, who has since passed away. But I just want to say thank you always because you guys stepped up when they needed you.

**CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:**

Legislator Barraga.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Nancy, I wanted to ask you, part of the film entails the family that needed financial assistance and help, and then you mentioned something about Friends of Karen pays certain bills of the family, and how is that determined?

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**MS. MARIANO:**

Okay. We pay anything that's medically connected, but what that means is it doesn't have to be a doctor's bill. It has to be something that is the result of their child being sick. That might mean that mom or dad has to stop work. So they have to go through a whole interview process, we have to see their W2's, we have to make sure they're not sitting on a huge bank account. We never touch retirement. We don't want any family to be penalized, right? But they send us the bill. It is scrutinized by their immediate social worker, the head of social workers and our CFO, and we pay the bill.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Well, are there limitations associated with that predicated on your own budget? You're paying these bills out of the money you raise and the money you receive. Is there a limit on how much you can provide these families based on your budget?

**MS. MARIANO:**

No, no. It's what they need. But sometimes, because we voted to turn -- never to turn a family away, if we were paying a mortgage for six months, we may not be able to pay it for six months. Maybe we can only pay for three months now. But there is no limitation. We're there as long as the family needs us.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Because I was looking at it from the standpoint of where does the dollars flow? Where do you get the monies to pay these bills?

**MS. MARIANO:**

We do major, major events. We do -- we're part of the Long Island Marathon. We do golf outings. We are getting ready to do an event, a Tribeca Rooftop in three weeks. Last year it was very, very successful. It's our 14th year we've been doing it. We raised \$937,000 last year. It's not going to happen again, it never happened before. It just was the right mixture of everybody. We usually raise about \$500,000 there. We do an event in Smithtown at Stonebridge every year. We do ride-a-thons. We are very fortunate to have people that could really, really help us. We have wonderful benefactors, supporters, people that care about us. We have year-end appeals. We fundraise -- I spend probably 95% of my time fundraising.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Okay. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:**

Anybody else? Nancy, thank you. I cannot, you know, say more than I already have to you because the work that you and your board do is just amazing. You know, we have so many children out there that need support and families and you're right, I think you are a gem and you're hidden and I think you need to be known that you're there. And thank you for coming into my district office. I know that we've sent a couple of people over to you as well. I just thank you because you definitely have been a great support system, so I appreciate everything that you have done.

**MS. MARIANO:**

Thank you, thank you. Thank you so much. Have a really good day. Thank you for inviting me.

**CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:**

Thank you. Okay. We also have Suffolk Community College here with us today. I know that they have a couple of words to say before the committee, so Ben if you would like to come up.

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### MR. ZWIRN:

Good afternoon. It's always good to be out here in the capital of Suffolk County out in the eastern end. I always say eastern end but I got 40 miles to go east of here to go home. This is a big County.

The Community College, we have some grants that aren't before you today but will probably be before you at the meeting on Wednesday. Katie Horst from the County Exec's Office will process them to the Local Law 40 Program. They are five grants that are 100% funded. One of them is for almost \$3 million for a cyber security grant from the Federal Government, which is the largest grant in the history of Suffolk Community College. So hopefully those will be before you in a packet on Wednesday.

Other than that, today you have a couple of -- one reappointment and an appointment to the Board of Trustees to the college, and we look forward to having a full board as soon as possible. There have been some changes on the board lately, but it's always exciting when you have -- you're working with new people and the new dynamics.

If there are any questions I'll be glad to -- I also want to welcome the class. We have a new class. Classes started yesterday. Kara Hahn's daughter is a member of this class, and she was there for classes with a broken leg and all. So we were glad to have the campus jumping again with students and come alive after the summer.

### CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Thank you, Ben. Okay. So continuing in on our agenda, we don't have any Tabled Resolutions, so we'll go into our Introductory Resolutions.

### INTRODUCTORY RESOLUTIONS

First one we have ***IR 1664 - Amending Resolution No. 920-2015, to establish a Community College Budget Committee to develop a long-term budget plan (Pres. Off.)***. I'll offer a motion to approve. Second by Legislator Kennedy. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? Motion carries. **(VOTE: 6-0-0-0)**

***IR 1666 - Reappointing member to the Suffolk County Community College Board of Trustees (James Morgo) (Martinez)***. Motion by Legislator Hahn, second by Legislator Barraga. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? Motion carries. **(VOTE: 6-0-0-0)**

***IR 1667 - To appoint member to the Suffolk County Child Care Commission (Erica L. Chase-Gregory) (Martinez)***. I will offer a motion to table as she was not able to be here with us today. Second by Legislator Kennedy. I will check if she can come on Wednesday.

### LEG. BROWNING:

So we can discharge it.

### CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

So we will continue with the tabling motion and motion carries. **(VOTE: 6-0-0-0)**.

***IR 1687 - Amending membership and terms of Suffolk County Women's Advisory Commission (Martinez)***. I'll make a motion to approve. Second by Legislator Browning. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? Motion carries. **(VOTE: 6-0-0-0)**

***IR 1741 - To appoint member to the Teen Pregnancy Advisory Board (Allison Heather Eliscu, M.D., F.A.A.P.) (Spencer)***. On behalf of the sponsor, he would like us to table this for this

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cycle, so I will motion to table. Second by Legislator Hahn. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? Motion carries. **(VOTE: 6-0-0-0)**

And **Resolution Number 1753 - Appoint member to the Suffolk County Community College Board of Trustees (Gemma Deleon-Lopresti) (Pres. Off.)**. I'm sure she's here today. If you can come toward, Gemma, and see if any of our committee members have any questions for you. We do have an opening in the Board of Trustee over at the college and Gemma has been recommended for this position. So if anybody has any questions for her, please ask. And, Gemma, if you could just tell us a little bit about yourself and how you will be a great addition to the board.

**MS. DELEON-LOPRESI:**

Thank you. Well, my name is Gemma Deleon. I'm the President of the Retail Wholesale Department Store Union Local 1102. We represent 12,000 members, primarily in retail but also in food service, throughout New York City and Nassau and Suffolk Counties. And I'm very eager to serve on the Board of Trustees if the Legislature will give me the opportunity. I think I have a unique qualification in that I know that the college is interested in expanding some of the programs to workforce development, and I think my union could be a good conduit for that in our ability to reach workers themselves and employers and give advice about the needs of the workforce in Suffolk County. I myself put myself through college and I know what it's like to not be able to have the means of -- from your parents to go to college, and so I think from that perspective I hope that I can be of service to the board. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:**

Are there any questions? Okay. So I will make a motion to approve your appointment. Second by Legislator Calarco. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? Motion carries. **(VOTE: 6-0-0-0)**. You do not have to appear before the entire Legislature on Wednesday, but if you would like to come you're more than welcome to. I wish you the best of luck and I look forward to working with you.

**MS. DELEON-LOPRESI:**

Thank you very much.

**CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:**

That concludes today's committee and agenda. We are adjourned.

**THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 1:00 PM**