

**HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE**  
**OF THE**  
**SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE**

A regular meeting of the Human Services Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York on Monday, April 16, 2012 at 10:00 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Legislator DuWayne Gregory, Chair  
Legislator Kara Hahn, Vice Chair  
Legislator Kate Browning  
Legislator Ed Romaine

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Legislator Lou D'Amaro

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

George Nolan, Counsel to the Legislature  
Sarah Simpson, Assistant Counsel to the Legislature  
Barbara LoMoriello, Deputy Clerk, Suffolk County Legislature  
Diane Dono, Budget Review Office  
Michael Pitcher, Aide to Presiding Officer Lindsay  
Paul Perillie, Aide to Legislator Gregory  
Ali Nazir, Aide to Legislator Kennedy  
Ben Zwirn, Assistant County Executive  
Greg Blass, Commissioner, Suffolk County Department of Social Services  
Linda O'Donohoe, Suffolk County Department of Social Services  
Ken Knappe, Suffolk County Department of Social Services  
Richard Koubek, Welfare to Work Commission  
Kathy Liguori, Welfare to Work Commission  
Pat Policastro, Suffolk County Youth Bureau  
Patsy Hirschhorn, Smithtown Youth Bureau  
Karen Haber, Huntington Youth Bureau  
Debbie Rimler, Tri-CYA  
Richard Meyer, AME, Legislative Director  
Other Interested Parties

**TAKEN AND TRANSCRIBED BY:**

Lucia Braaten, Court Stenographer

**(\*THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 10:06 A.M. \*)**

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Okay. Good morning. Welcome to today's Human Services meeting. We will get started off with the Pledge of Allegiance, led by Legislator Hahn.

**(\*Salutation\*)**

Okay. We're going to start off with the public portion. We have one card, Donna Napoli. Napoli, I'm sorry.

**REVEREND PEARSON:**

She's coming up with me.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Oh, she is. Oh, okay. All right. Then we'll go to the presentations. We have several presentations today, and we will ask Commissioner Blass to come up first.

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee. I have with me today the Finance Director, Ken Knappe. I have two from the Division of Client Benefits. On my left, that's Tom Grecco, the Assistant Division Administrator, and next to him is Tom Contegni, Chief Management Analyst for the Division.

There are two things I'd like to discuss with the committee, these gentlemen will be helpful for the first part, and that concerns some very difficult news, Mr. Chairman, that we have relative to the issue of child care. And I am going to ask the Committee to understand that this is set against the background of child care being provided to more children than ever in Suffolk County without waiting lists; further, to the increased demand that we have had. This is also set against the background of the diminishing child care block grant, which is the source of funding for child care in Suffolk County. We are at a crossroads now, given the drop in funding, the diminishing availability of funds, the -- I should say the expenditure of a good portion of the funding from this point forward and what we have to do to keep it viable.

And with that, I will turn to Ken Knappe first, and then we will give a more specific presentation that's the subject of a handout we provided. And then after that, we will be glad to discuss any questions the committee may have. And for that, I will turn it over, with the Chairman's permission, to Ken Knappe.

**MR. KNAPPE:**

Good morning, Legislators. The child care expenditures for 2012 are estimated, if everything stays as is -- and just for everybody's informational purposes, we're at 185% of the State standards for child care, we're at 185% of the poverty level, and that was a drop from 200 from several months ago. We were hoping that this decrease would mitigate any other options that we would need to make. We were hoping that this come in line. But as my colleagues are going to go through, as we decrease the non-temporary assistance side, we have seen an increase in temporary assistance side. Expenditures are still growing. If we stayed the course, we'd be in excess of 37, 38 million dollars as of right now. We looked, we have three months worth of payment so far to date. Tracking it, I do not feel comfortable that with the 185%, we're going to get to the thirty million or the twenty-nine-nine million that we have available, it's just too large of a delta.

We looked at options and Mr. Contegni and Mr. Grecco will go through it. Decreases in the standards need to be made for us to come in line with the block grant and what is available. Without these tough decisions, we'd be in over eight million dollars more than what we have to spend. And with everything going on right now in the County's fiscal world, of course, this is just not an option to have that much of an overrun without making tough decisions. That's where we are with the expenditures right now, and they'll go through. We were at fifty-nine-hundred-and-eighty-one children receiving subsidized child care in December, and we are currently around fifty-five hundred as of right now for the month ending in March. So, as I said, they went through some models and some computer reports to see how far down we had to go to come to within budget. And I'll defer to them at this point.

**MR. GRECCO:**

Okay. Good morning. Just to give you some kind of a background on child care, back in 2010, we did get ARRA funding, which allowed us to open up the waiting list, because we did have a waiting list up through about May of '10 for families looking for child care, and, at that point, that money allowed us to open up the doors. And then we saw the increase in the number of families we were serving. I mean, just in the last year, March 2011, we had forty-seven hundred children being served. A year later, we had almost fifty-seven hundred. So the ARRA money did go quite a ways, but that was finite.

Now, for the fiscal year April 1st through March 31st, we received a child care block grant, almost thirty million dollars, Twenty-nine-nine. Now, that's a fixed amount of money that we get. Then the State government says, "We're going to increase the market rates, we're going to bump up the State eligibility standards." So you're working with a fixed amount of money. However, the State keeps raising the limits, and so it affects the amount of children that you can serve. So that's somewhat the predicament we're in right now. And compounding that, the temporary assistance caseload has just -- you know, unfortunately that has increased and that's been driving the demand for child care.

So there is one other minor thing that drives up the cost of care and the amount of care that you can give is that the State makes the counties guarantee child care to those families who are leaving temporary assistance when they get a job for a full year, which is a good thing. We want people transitioning. However, again, it plays into that finite amount of money that you have. I mean, I hate to say you only have one pizza, but that's what happens, and the State keeps adding people and adding groups that are -- have child care guarantees. So that's what's kind of forcing our hand right now.

So the flexibility that we do have is to establish at what income standard we want to choose, whether we want to go to 100% of the State income standard, which is pretty Draconian. We're at -- we were always at 200%. We had to lower it to 185% of the State income standard. And on Long Island, that's -- you know, that's pretty much where you need to be. Our demand for child care just three years ago was 38 million dollars, and we got less than 30 million dollars, and the market rates have gone up. So the market rates are -- the established rates that the State says you can pay a provider based on the modality, such as the day-care center, family day-care center, that kind of thing, and the market rates are based on the age of children. So the younger children get paid more because there's more care involved than children who may need after-school care, that kind of thing.

So that being said, you know, we're going to have to definitely bring down the market standard or the State income standard; we're suggesting that we do that. But I'm going to switch over to Mr. Contegni to speak about the standards.

**MR. CONTEGNI:**

How do you do? Tom explained the situation we're dealing with, and I'd like to address what our options, what we can do.

Our State plan allows us to go as low as 150%. When we did the plan, never thought that would -- we'd have to go below that point. If we want to amend our plan below 150% of the State income standard, we have to publish notice that we intend to do this and open -- wait 30 days for public comment, and then we have to send the public comment along with the plan to OCFS and get approval. Only then can we ladder below the 150%. That's just background so you know the world we operate in.

Our choices are twofold. We can close the doors, as we did three years ago. We're providing child care for 144 new children every month. If we stop intake, if we stop intake at this time totally, our savings between now and December will be 3.1 million dollars of the shortfall that we're expecting, and it's simple math. 144 children times the number of month of payments, times the average cost of, which is \$579 per month. So that's one option. Another option is to go down to 150% on the intake. Of course, reducing that would reduce about 43% of that figure, and the savings would be about \$900,000. That's an option. So one side is -- and a decision has to be made. If we close the doors to new applicants, do we stop totally? Do we stop at 150%? Do we look at other options lower? The other side is closing ongoing open cases.

There's approximately a two, even three-month lag. Between service provided and when the checks are cut, between attendance forms, records, sign-offs, our own accounting area, cutting the checks, going through the Treasury, all that procedure takes at least two months. So, when you close a case, you're not going to see the savings for a few months. So the savings are less dramatic than closing a door on new expenses. We looked at going to 150%, and at 150%, an additional -- 187 and 568. About 775 children would lose their child care services. Now, the savings at 150% would be an additional -- let me see, half a million and -- about 2.1 million dollars if we did -- if we went to that figure. Unfortunately, there will be an impact when these low income working families lose their child care. We know how expensive child care is. Some, I don't know how many, will transition into temporary assistance and we'll get them right back in child care costs on the TA side, plus we get families that are currently self-sufficient, with help, with subsidized child care, that would probably transition into temporary assistance.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Any questions? Anybody else?

**MR. GRECCO:**

I just wanted to mention one thing. If we were to lower the State income standards, we realize it's going to impact families, and, you know, we're certainly not immune to that. So we do plan on doing outreach and informing any family about our "My Benefits" website, about the availability for different family supports, like the earned income tax credit, food stamps, HEAP benefits. So it's not going to totally mitigate the impact, but we're trying to lessen it to whatever degree we can.

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

Okay. That concludes our presentation, Members of the Committee, Mr. Chairman. I do want to emphasize that no decision about the trauma of child care decline has been made. As you know, the Department has endeavored to be proactive with the committee and try to forewarn you of what we're dealing with before the crisis really hits. That's what's before us. Essentially, the State of New York, which is in a peculiar fashion very immune from any real critique, I'm amazed by it, has carefully built the building blocks of this dilemma we find by raising the market rate arbitrarily, but diminishing the block grant arbitrarily, by setting a formula to calculate this block grant, which has been a remarkably difficult moving target, so that we can't even anticipate what it's going to be.

The very basis by which the child care block grant is calculated and formulated has changed in four major ways in the past six years, and that is why we even today still don't know what the block grant's going to be for the rest of 2000 -- for the next fiscal year, as the budget just came out. The budget did indicate, I believe, a two million dollar increase statewide. Whether that will benefit Suffolk County or not, we don't know. We find that there might be somewhat of a regional prejudice in budget-making in Albany where they still regard Suffolk County as the land of The Hamptons. And we have our work cut out for us, even in NYPWA and among my fellow commissioners, convincing them that, no, Suffolk County has a vast need for Social Services, budgetary common sense, and we haven't been getting it.

But, anyway, that's where we are. We will keep you apprized of the decisions that we make, but we have to make some soon, because the notices have to go out, amendments to the plan have to be approved by the State. It's a tedious process. And on the TA side of the equation, temporary assistance doesn't really pay out of its own funds for child care, it's the child care block grant that still pays them as well.

**MR. GRECCO:**

Right.

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

So we have that problem of the diminished block grant, an increase in the market rate, an extreme increase in children and family seeking child care. So with that, we'll be glad to answer any questions.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Okay. Before I go to my colleague, Legislator Romaine, so our numbers, as I look at the chart, have been going up. As you just stated, the block grant has been going down, our numbers have been going up, and the market rates are going up, which the market rates and the incline in assistance is kind of -- you know, they go in the opposite direction. The more people you have, the less you can help, especially -- well, I guess with the higher market rates, the less people you can help with the limited block grant. Now, what does that mean? Does this mean -- I think I caught you saying that we're going to have an eight million dollar hole or shortfall?

**MR. KNAPPE:**

Our projections right now, if we look at the same level of increase or the same amount of children receiving care today and they stay on board throughout the Summer and in the Fall, our budget estimates would be approximately 38 million dollars in the child care world, versus twenty-nine-nine in the block grant, as well as the expenditure line in the budget. It is possible that we get a little bump-up up in the block grant from the State if and when they ever make that decision. It's been as late as August sometimes, it's been as early as middle of May. So I don't know exactly what our block grant's going to be for the 2012-13 year. But if we stayed the current course that we're in, they're going to be approximately 38 million dollars in expenditures.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Okay. Now, because of the State, we're limited in what we can do. You've laid out pretty much the options that we have. We're at -- we already reduced it from 200 to 185, and you haven't made a decision yet on 150%. But just -- go ahead, I'm sorry.

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

I was going to say that there are more options. We can go lower than 150.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Oh, you can?

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

We could go to one -- we could go to -- the State limits us to 150. With their expressed consent, which we'd have to apply for, we could go to a poverty rate of 125 -- I'm sorry, an eligibility rate of 125% above the poverty level, which most counties are at now.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

And what does that mean? If the State --

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

That would mean that those whose income is above 125% of the poverty level would be ineligible.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

No, I understand that, but just the language that you just --

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

Oh, in terms of savings?

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

No, the State. You said the State is at -- their cutoff is at 150, but we can go below that? I don't understand that.

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

If we apply for that. Our plan -- I'll give you the -- I'll let --

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Oh, we can do it on our own to 150?

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Right.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Oh, I get it, okay.

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

We could do it on our own if we fund it, but we could also do it on our own -- whether the block grant is enough or not is irrelevant, they'll still keep it at that, and they -- the block grant will stay at the same level. The lowering of eligibility by lowering the percentage above the poverty rate, that helps us to save the expense of the administration of the program.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

That I understand. Now, just for general public's consumption, what is 150? I mean, I know it's not, you know, king's ransom. We're not talking about people making \$90,000 a year.

**MR. GRECCO:**

I don't have the standards in front of me, but off the top of my head, I would say a family of two, I think the annual income, the 100% level I believe is somewhere in the \$14,000 range. So 150% of that is roughly 21.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

So it's based on a family of two, not family of four?

**MR. GRECCO:**

It's based on family size. It will go up as a family gets larger, obviously.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Okay. All right. Legislator Romaine, you had a question?

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Yes. Let's start with the poverty level. This is a program for child care for people who are working. I'm a single mother, I have two kids, I'm working, I'm making 28, 29 thousand dollars, some entry level job, and then it's based on the fact that I can put my kids in a child care program. Child care program is now deemed ineligible for me. I'm saying to myself, "Let's see, might be eligible for food stamps, would definitely be eligible if I didn't work. Probably would be eligible for Social Services, probably would be eligible for Medicaid and medical coverage that I won't have to pay for, and I'd get child care services." Is there a fear that many marginal families, if denied child care, may choose to stop working and seek instead public assistance, in fact, driving up our costs even further?

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

Definitely, yes, there is that deep concern, and that arises from the fact that the counties all over the State have been at 125 and they leave it to the counties to make up the difference, and we don't have --

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Okay. Now, in the last three years, the State, New York State Child Care Block Grant has cut Suffolk County by five million dollars, despite the fact that our child care has grown from 4,000 to 6,000. And now, because of the 2012/2013 allocation in Suffolk County, we will have to drop about 1,724 previously eligible children because of loss of these subsidies. And we will have to increase the cost of child care to the parents from 15% to 30%, and we will have to decrease the eligibility level of say 200%, which it was at, to now 185%, but that alone is not enough. You're claiming that even by dropping it from 200 to 185, that you will not be able to meet your budget numbers, and as a result, you're talking of taking it down now from 185 to possibly 150, even 125 of the poverty rate, making more working families ineligible for child care? And then you have to begin to weigh, particularly if I'm a marginal family, does it really pay for me to work, considering the other options out there? And, you know, we have budget crises, they come and go, it seems like they're permanent in Suffolk, but -- and now worse now than ever, but when you push down in one area, my experience is it grows in another, that there is no way to solve this problem, it would seem like. Having done that, and I appreciate your information on this, with the Chairman's permission, I want to digress just for a second.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

I know where you want to go.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

No. I'm just going to make one point. You were before this committee -- I was going to read your testimony, but I'm not in the sake of brevity -- last October denouncing the former County Executive's budget. It's an issue all of us will have to face very shortly.

This Legislature, and I wasn't happy about voting for it, and I made it quite clear on the record, decided to adopt a budget that funded the positions for six months. Well, it's now April. I haven't seen an alternative budget or any attempt to amend the budget. Layoff notices are going out at the end of this week or next week. The very same budget that most the people around this horseshoe, 60 people, denounced, the very same budget is going to go into effect on July 1st, particularly as it applies to Social Services. And I can read your testimony, but I don't want to, but it's available to

everyone to go back to the October budget meeting and how devastating. Both you and Commissioner Tomarken, our Health Commissioner, spoke with great passion about the impact and how haphazard that list was done, how 100% funded positions were being eliminated. You spoke with great clarity on that. I just will say, and you don't have to respond, that budget will go into effect July 1st, because in the six months, four months of which we've used, no alternative has come forward. So I'm waiting each and every day, because you will be confronted with the exact same budget that Mr. Levy put forward. It just won't be -- instead of January 1st, it's July 1st. So unless there's a change of course, that budget will go into effect. Thank you for appearing.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Okay. Legislator Hahn had a question, then Legislator Browning.

**LEG. HAHN:**

Well, first of all, I just want to say this is going to be devastating to families. You know that. In addition to families, the communities. I mean, child care centers that rely on these -- these families and serving these children will also be devastated, which, in turn, impacts the other families that are present at those centers as well, if centers have to close, etcetera. So this is very, very -- there's really a domino effect in communities, our economy, that has to be considered as well. And I've asked the Chair if we could maybe put together a joint letter to the State, or something that we can do to -- when we talk about the block grant and finding out sooner, rather than later, about more dollars.

Did you track the families when you dropped eligibility from 200% to 185% and what happened to them? Did they come back through the other side of child care?

**MR. CONTEGNI:**

We had initial loss of approximately 500 cases closed during January and February as we reduced the standard from 200 to 185%. However, there was no drop in the intake side in the eligibility. So we've already made up most of that initial loss at 185, and in another month or two, we'll be right back up to fifty-nine hundred, we're at fifty-six hundred now, children.

**LEG. HAHN:**

Right. However, my question was, if you lose a family because of -- working family because of the eligibility drop from 200 to 185, and that family then can no longer work, and comes back through the other side of the -- have you had enough time to track if that is happening? Do you understand kind of what I'm getting at?

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Yes. Your question, Legislator Hahn, speaks to what was this crossover from self-sustainable families with child care going over to becoming temporary assistance clients --

**LEG. HAHN:**

Right.

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

-- and what that cost was. Do we have that available?

**MR. CONTEGNI:**

No. It hasn't been long enough. These families were first impacted in January and February. We haven't tracked those particular families to see -- and it will be a few months. We wouldn't know for some time. We would have to -- we could run a TA report on those families three or four months down the road and see how many became Temporary Assistance families.

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

But what we'll do is we'll start putting that track electronically now so that we'll have it available to us, if we haven't already. I just don't know if we have.

**LEG. HAHN:**

I suspect we'll see the same families coming through on the other side, which will just show how important this is to keep families working. And we know this, this is like intuitive. This is -- you know, this kind of decision is going against everything we're saying when we're saying we want to put economic development in this County first. This is the kind of decision that's going to railroad plans to move our -- the economics of this County forward. People, if they want to work, you know, need to have someplace safe, and the quality, and available for their children. And this is the kind of decision that I know you're forced to make it.

Did we -- did I hear you say that 29.9 million dollars was the block grant and that was the amount that we budgeted? So we just basically said whatever that we get is all we're spending?

**MR. KNAPPE:**

That has been the general rule of thumb over the last year or two. In the past, the Legislature has added -- I think about four or five years ago a million dollars was added to the child care appropriation. I think the County Executive's Office, around that similar time, that same time, also added an additional million dollars to it. But as of right now, this is -- you are correct, it's twenty-nine-nine in the block grant, and we match our appropriation on the expenditure side to match the block grant.

**LEG. HAHN:**

Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Legislator Browning.

**LEG. BROWNING:**

I think a lot of what was asked has been asked. And, again, here we see another example of the State balancing their budget on the backs of the lower municipalities, like the counties. Just out of curiosity, what I'd like to do is if you could translate, you know, what the income standards are and the market rate into dollars. Can you give me some of that information?

**MR. GRECCO:**

The income standards, the State says essentially you have to provide child care up to 100% of the State income standard. The counties have the latitude to decide how high above the State income standard we can go. Now, based on Long Island, we know that, you know, the income is higher here than it may be up in Upstate New York, so we always have opted to --

**LEG. BROWNING:**

Okay. What's that number?

**MR. GRECCO:**

The number, I don't have it off the top of my head, but I would say, for a family of two, it's roughly 14,000 and change. So, if we opted for 200%, it would be 28,000 would be the cutoff for eligibility.

**LEG. BROWNING:**

Okay. And the market --

**MR. GRECCO:**

Which is still -- you know, we know that's still pretty low, but --

**LEG. BROWNING:**

Right. And the market rate increase, what --

**MR. GRECCO:**

The market rate increase is just -- it's the State standard by which is the cap, what we can pay, you know, day-care providers, whether they're informal providers all the way up to licensed day-care centers.

**LEG. BROWNING:**

And what's that in dollars and cents?

**MR. GRECCO:**

It varies based on whether it's full or part-time care, the age of the children. There are a lot of factors. It's a whole matrix, but I certainly have all that information that I can supply you with.

**LEG. BROWNING:**

Okay. And, you know, I appreciate Legislator Romaine's comments about if you're going to suppress it in one side, it's going to come up on another. And when we talk about mitigation plans, I was not involved myself. I was not asked to participate in trying to come up with some mitigation plan for -- to save the jobs and to try and help with this budget hole that we have. I know there was -- maybe four Legislators were involved on a bipartisan level. There was a number of 162 million that was brought up as far as to save. Have you met yet? Because I know that last week I've sat, myself, in three separate meetings with various departments. And the County Executive I know has had all of the departments meet with him to try and mitigate the staff losses in the former County Executive's budget plan. So have you met yet with the County Executive?

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

Yes, that's affirmative. We met, in fact, Friday.

**LEG. BROWNING:**

Okay.

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

And several Legislators were in attendance, as well as Civil Service. Budget Review was there and members of the Executive's Administration.

**LEG. BROWNING:**

Okay. You know, I know that there's a collective bargaining agreement that --

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

Correction. That was -- I apologize.

**LEG. BROWNING:**

Okay.

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

That was Thursday, not Friday.

**LEG. BROWNING:**

On Thursday? Okay. It's just that I know that there's a collective bargaining agreement that

requires a 60-day notice. I know that this County Executive is currently working very hard to try and come up with the savings with your department, and I'm -- I'm not going to ask you how it's going right now, but, you know, with a bit of luck, come July 1st, those layoff numbers will not be what the former County Executive had in his budget.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Legislator D'Amaro.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I apologize for being late this morning, and I did miss the presentation. I apologize to you, Commissioner, as well as your staff.

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

We have a handout for you.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

I have it. Thank you. I wanted to ask you, just before I get into what's on my mind, the block grant you're speaking to, does that fund salaries, or is that strictly to fund the day-care providers?

**MR. KNAPPE:**

It's predominantly to pay for children receiving care. There is a piece of the block grant that is chartered that we can claim administrative expenses to. It's less than the local districts' maintenance of effort. Now I'm getting a little technical, so I apology. The maintenance of effort is the 25% of the TA world, so it's kind of an offset. We get to claim a little bit of the administrative piece against the block grant, and the County pays a little piece of the care that goes out to children. So all in all, it's pretty close to a wash, so, predominantly, all the money goes to the child care providers.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Okay, good. Now, the -- we're talking today about the State poverty level. That seems to be the -- sets the threshold for who's eligible and who is not. And you mentioned that the State only requires the County to provide the day-care funding up to 100% of the State poverty level; is that correct?

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

Yes.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Now, that requirement, is that how the block grant is determined? Does the block grant cover the 100% of the State requirement?

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

Let me ask how the plan -- we have to have a plan approved. I'll ask these gentlemen to describe that plan vis-a-vis the block grant.

**MR. GRECCO:**

We have to submit a plan, and our last plan I think was a five-year plan. And you could amend it at any point, as long as you give proper public notice. Does the block grant cover 100% of the State poverty standard? That's a great question. I would say I believe it does, but I don't think it's factored in as part of their formula when they're giving out the block grant, because our caseload has gone up year after year after year, yet our block grant funding has gone down. So there's obviously no correlation between the two.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

All right. That's fine. But it just happens to meet the mandate imposed by the State with respect to day-care, so it's not an unfunded mandate from the State, it's a fully funded mandate.

**MR. GRECCO:**

Correct.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Okay. Now, has this County, do you know -- has this County ever had the funding level set at 100%, where the County has not provided -- well, no, scratch that. Just have we ever been at 100% and not higher?

**MR. GRECCO:**

I don't believe so. We've always been --

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Do you know what the lowest threshold we've had?

**MR. GRECCO:**

We've always been around the 200% threshold for as long as I've been involved with child care.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Generally speaking, then is the amount over 100% usually funded by the County, or was it also part of the block grant as well, which has been diminishing over time?

**MR. GRECCO:**

It's funded by the block grant.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

It is.

**MR. GRECCO:**

As the funds --

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Right.

**MR. GRECCO:**

-- get drawn down.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

All right. So let me ask you -- so what -- based on the block grant that you anticipate for this year, what percentage above 100% can we fund, if any?

**MR. GRECCO:**

I think we should be prudent and stay at 125% of the State income standard.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

So the block grant, without any County participation, would fund -- and I'm not talking about salaries and all that, I'm just talking about provider funding. The block grant will cover -- this year's block grant with cover 125% threshold?

**MR. GRECCO:**  
We'll be close.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**  
Okay.

**MR. GRECCO:**  
We'll be close.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**  
Now, the County budget that we enacted, that anticipated a higher threshold, I would assume. And what was the higher threshold set at in our County budget?

**MR. KNAPPE:**  
The County budget line, the expenditure line traditionally mirrors the block grant line.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**  
Okay.

**MR. KNAPPE:**  
So I've talked in front of this committee and the past committees, talking about like a drawbridge effect. We keep track of the expenditures and the block grant. We want to make sure that we don't leave any dollars on the table, but we also don't want to make sure without advising the policy-makers if we're oversubscribing. So we're constantly tracking to make sure that we provide care to as much as possible, to as many children.

As far as what was the decision-making process when the budget was enacted -- it was -- we went from the 200% State income standards down to 185. And at that point in time, we thought that, you know, depending on how everything was going with the number of children being served, that that might be enough to get us to a point; it isn't.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**  
So when the 185 was established in the budget that we passed --

**MR. KNAPPE:**  
I'm sorry.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**  
Okay. Just follow me here. If we pass the budget, we assume that we'd be able to fund 185% of the poverty level for day-care providers' services. Was that 185 amount based solely on what the anticipated block grant was at the time, or was the County participating as well in the budget?

**MR. KNAPPE:**  
No, it's basically what the block grant was at the time.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**  
All right. So, what in effect happened is the block grant, as it materializes, is far less than -- it's about 125%, not 185%.

**MR. KNAPPE:**  
That's correct. If you want to look at the flip side of it, the true demand to provide care to everybody who falls within that 185% standard, we would need about 38 million dollars in block grant dollars.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

All right. But how much more additional above the block grant?

**MR. KNAPPE:**

Eight million dollars

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Eight million. That's what you had said before. Okay.

**MR. KNAPPE:**

Could I just --

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Sure.

**MR. KNAPPE:**

Could I just correct one other thing, too?

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Of course, yes.

**MR. KNAPPE:**

We were talking about the income standards and if we ever went as low as we are, talking about in this committee. Back several years ago, we instituted a wait list, and nobody receiving -- no non-temporary assistance families were receiving care at that point. What we are doing here is instead of -- we are keeping 125%, rather than the decision-making process that we went at that point.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

All right. So my last question is, now, if nothing changes, we can provide less assistance based on higher payment amounts, based on lower block grants and demand. How does your department determine who gets the assistance if the demand is exceeding what's available? How do you -- do you just do it first come, first serve? How is that done? You know, if -- like if someone walks into the office and says, "I need" -- "I need help with day-care," I mean, do you just keep funding it, you know, as long as you meet eligibility, until you reach a point where you just turn everyone away after that? I mean, how does that work?

**MR. CONTEGNI:**

All right. I'll take that one. When people apply for child care, I'm talking non-temporary assistance, we -- before January 1st, we allowed up to 200% of the State income standard, the State poverty level. Effective January 1st, we lowered that to 185%. So that was the first step. Now in our plan, we put additional ranks down to 175, down to 165, down to 150. We put all these different ranks in. We can get reports, we have run them, of how many of our children are affected if we go down to 175. We go down --

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

All right. So if I could interrupt you, I understand what you're saying. So the percentage is meeting -- the percentage determines the cutoff, in effect?

**MR. CONTEGNI:**

Exactly.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Okay. So --

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

In anticipation of it.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Right, okay. Now I understand that. So someone who comes in and applies and -- today and says -- you know, fills out an application and they're at 145, in effect, would be turned away at this point, because we know we're only at 125 with the block grant; is that correct?

**MR. CONTEGNI:**

No. That's why we're here now. We haven't --

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

We're at one-eighty --

**MR. CONTEGNI:**

One-eight-five.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Well, I know, but you said the funding here available for this year is only to the 125% level. So don't you have to administer at that level at this point?

**MR. CONTEGNI:**

With your approval, we're -- that's why we're here now.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Okay.

**MR. CONTEGNI:**

We realize some moves have to be made --

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Right.

**MR. CONTEGNI:**

-- to avoid an eight million dollar shortfall.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Right.

**MR. CONTEGNI:**

We're at 185 now. We would have to close 187 and 568 children to get to 150%. If we went to -- I mean, I'm sorry. If we went all the way down to 150%, fourteen hundred children would lose their child care services, and the impact that would have on approximately a thousand families.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Right, okay. But short of the County stepping up to the plate and providing additional funding, we're at the 125 level, is what we're saying.

**MR. CONTEGNI:**

Yes.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

And so, between the 185, what we were hoping for when we passed our budget, and the 125, how many children are affected, did you say?

**MR. CONTEGNI:**

Fourteen hundred.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Fourteen hundred children. Fourteen hundred children, okay. And, Commissioner Blass, there's no -- you've mentioned there might be a little bit more coming in the block grant, but you don't anticipate enough to make up the shortfall, do you, the eight million?

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

No. The next block grant is -- we, again, have no idea how they formulated it. We're not sure what it's going to be. We're assuming it's going to stay at the current level, we don't have that assumption. We don't have entire confidence in that assumption either.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

That's interesting how that block grant is even determined. It's probably some magic secret formula that no one really knows anything about. I'm just curious.

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

It's very complicated, it is arbitrary. Counties are constantly objecting to it. Why they would raise market rates as a mandate, why they would see the demand in some counties climbing exponentially as here, and then come to the conclusion that that justifies a reduced block grant is only the kind of wisdom Albany has.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Right, right, which is not in the real world. One other question. Is Nassau County also provided a block grant, do you know, that meets the 125 level? Is that similar to other counties in the State and Nassau County?

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

Yes. All the block grants, they vary from county to county. Ours and Nassau's are generally the same, I believe. We have it right here.

**MR. KNAPPE:**

Just to put it in perspective, the 2010/11 State fiscal year block grant for Suffolk was approximately 32.3 million; Nassau was twenty-nine-one. The 2011 and '12 fiscal year, Suffolk's was reduced to 30.6 million, Nassau went up to 31.7, so -- and if you look at a lot of the counties, there's very little, as the Commissioner was saying, rhyme or reason besides backing into the methodology formula, the demand, and why these go up and down.

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

And once you do understand the formula --

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Right.

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

-- they change it drastically.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

I believe it, I believe it. Commissioner, is there any room in your budget areas where we could provide additional funding?

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

We did that with the shortage of Safety Net. Those -- in the last quarter of '11. We are in a drastic situation where we barely have with what to buy office supplies. It's become far different from the past. And we recognize that child care serves a component of the population that the Budget Review Office wisely identified many years ago, I remember, as the at-risk population, the population that just has to have one more incident such as the loss of a car, high medical expense, illness of a breadwinner, and they become totally government dependent. Child care is one of those essential programs for the path of sustainability that we cherish as a program, and it is a -- certainly a major part of the foundation of the economy of this County, for the workforce of Suffolk County. The workforce of Suffolk County, the entry level workforce is going to be terrifically and terribly hard hit if these shortfalls come to pass, but we have no choice. The only alternative is to come up with money from a County treasury that's already drastically depleted.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

That's right. And as far as choices, you know, we're working on that as well, but that's not the topic here today. What's the total demand in Suffolk County for this type of day-care? What level would we need to go at to be 100%?

**MR. KNAPPE:**

To get back to where we were at the 200%, as I mentioned, the 185%, it would be about 38 million dollars we're projecting. So, to go back to where we were pre-January 2012, my estimate would be in excess of 40 million, 41 million dollars for the year.

Just to put it a little bit in perspective, December 2011 we hit our historic highs of the number of children being served, 5,981 children. Just to go back to January 2010, that number was only 3,746. That increase of twenty-two hundred children-plus just shows the demand that Suffolk County has. And, if you look at the block grant dollars and everything else like that, that commitment doesn't match the demand.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

When someone applies for this type of assistance, is it something -- is it the type of assistance that normally a person does not rotate out of, or is it something where it's more of a stopgap kind of measure, assistance in a time of need, and then someone finds the ability to eventually, you know, get beyond the eligibility standards and -- I mean, what kind of rate do you have where, you know, new applicants, as opposed to those who are no longer applying, although have a need for day-care, but not for the subsidy?

**MR. CONTEGNI:**

Every six months every case is recertified. The people have to prove their income once again, their eligibility. There is not a lot of attrition.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

All right.

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

Not now.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

All right. And what's your feeling as far as administering the program itself? Do you believe that

there is some individuals applying who really should not be receiving the assistance?

**MR. KNAPPE:**

One of the initiatives that the State is making is to make sure and to use a New York State Office of Family and Children Services tag line, "Every Dollar Counts." Before the Legislature, I think next week, at the next round of committee meetings, it's being laid on the table at the next Legislative meeting, is a grant that the County was awarded from the State to look at the fraud piece of it, to make sure that those who are truly eligible are the ones that are getting it, and ones that are trying to, for the lack of better terms, beat the system, we might be able to indicate, and make sure that every dollar truly does count.

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Yeah, that's important in any government program, but more so important when there's limited resources, and people who need should really be, you know, first in line. Okay. Well, thank you. Thank you for answering my questions, I appreciate it. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Legislator Hahn.

**LEG. HAHN:**

I'm a little confused because you talk about us moving from 185 to 150, but then also thrown in this conversation is talk of moving to 125. So which is it?

**MR. KNAPPE:**

What we're doing right now is we know the level of care currently can't -- we can't sustain it. We are looking at several different models to see what level we can sustain with the twenty-nine-nine million block grant. And that's where we are looking at the 150 level, which is as far down as we can do without modifying the consolidated services plan. And we are also looking at, you know, the numbers and the number of children being served if we go down to as far as 125%.

**LEG. HAHN:**

Right. So you said fourteen hundred children would lose care if we go to 150. Do you have the number if we go to 125?

**MR. CONTEGNI:**

Yeah, yes. It would be just about 2000, 1991, just based on the numbers right now of people we have right now.

**LEG. HAHN:**

And I'm sorry, you probably answered this over and over, and I just want to be clear.

**MR. CONTEGNI:**

Okay.

**LEG. HAHN:**

If we go -- I'm sorry.

**MR. CONTEGNI:**

If we went to 150%, we would have to close -- approximately fourteen hundred children would lose their child care. If we went to 125%, about 2000, approximately 2000 children would lose their child care.

**LEG. HAHN:**

So -- and by going to this percentage, it's not only for existing clients, but new enrollees as well, so it's the -- it's -- people would just be told, "Okay, we've dropped our standard, you're no longer eligible," they go from paying a co-pay to paying the full cost of care overnight, or within a month, or whatever it is. So it's kind of a big cliff that they hit.

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

There's another part of the cliff, Legislator Hahn, and that is that many will find alternate child care arrangements that are not enriching, might not even be with a person that is qualified to provide that kind of care and attention to a child. It is fraught with risk. But there are some families that won't automatically transition to temporary assistance and will make do with what they can and hunker down in their current positions and find alternate child care of some sort, which is probably not nearly the quality of child care that is provided through these programs.

**LEG. HAHN:**

Yes, I'm well aware of what parents try to do to make do, which is very, very -- A, can be dangerous, in addition to just not being stimulating for the child. Did we -- I kind of missed a little bit of the first question Legislator D'Amaro asked. Did we get at the cost of living in Suffolk, and were you asking if the block grant was an attempt to cover 100% poverty if you take into account the cost of living in Suffolk? Or how does that -- is that the question you asked?

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

Yes, but is not correlated.

**LEG. HAHN:**

It's not correlated. Okay. I wasn't sure if that was the question you asked. Okay. Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Okay. Legislator Browning?

**LEG. BROWNING:**

Yeah. There was some other questions, but I see you have some other speakers. I wanted to talk to them on a separate issue, so I guess we'll save that for afterwards. But just out of curiosity, because I know that one of the things I've asked you about in the past, you know, with the SafetyNet and how many non-residents are applying for the safety net. Do you see any -- is there similarities here with the day-care where you're seeing people who have just moved to New York and applying for it?

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

We are finding generally the recently relocated families and individuals who seek any program virtually comes to the neighborhood of between six and seven percent of the total applications, but we are monitoring that.

**LEG. BROWNING:**

Okay. I think that would be interesting for us to get that, and where they're coming from, if it's even possible. That's good.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Okay. Thank you, Commissioner and staff, for your insightful presentation, but, yet, sobering.

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to say one thing about the budget.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Sure.

**COMMISSIONER BLASS:**

And the layoffs and the discussions that are going on. I am given to understand that there's substantial discussion. I don't know if any Legislators here are involved in it, but I know some Legislators are indicating that when it comes to layoffs, public safety personnel are off the table, that they will not be the subject of any layoffs. I don't criticize that understanding, I perfectly understand it. I know exactly what kinds of dynamics go into the decision-making of budgets as well as anyone. But, I do want to suggest that when we consider public safety, we not over look the fact that Child Protective Services investigators, Social Services examiners, caseworker trainees, and the number of other positions that have been unfortunately targeted to expire in June, that we're working on now, as Legislator Browning alluded to, they also are deeply involved in public safety. Domestic violence and child abuse and elder abuse, and petitioning cases to court in a rapid fashion are -- and emergency housing issues are as deeply included in the public safety net as any other kind of position, whether it's in uniform law enforcement or in District Attorney's Office or elsewhere. And I, therefore, in closing just wanted to suggest the advisability of making sure that discussions about avoiding layoffs for public safety has to by definition include those layoffs that are targeted for the Department of Social Services. And with that I thank you.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Okay. Thank you, Commissioner.

*(\*Applause\*)*

Next, we're going to ask Dr. Koubek to come up, and Kathy Liguori of the Welfare to Work Commission. Good morning.

**MR. KOUBEK:**

Good morning. Thank you very much for the invitation for us to present today on the annual report of the Welfare to Work Commission, and special thanks to Legislator Romaine who asked us to do so. So let me just say a few opening comments.

This Commission was established by the Legislature in 2003 on a resolution from Legislator Vivian Vilorio-Fisher, and we were just reauthorized. And our function is to advise the Legislature, and I would say other governmental officials as well, on policies that would affect people moving from welfare to work. And over the years we have also -- we have also focused on people who are working and could move to welfare, and more and more they are becoming a concern of ours. And I'm going to in a few minutes pass the microphone to Kathy Liguori, who not only is Vice Chair of the Commission, I'm the Chair, but she chairs our Child Care Committee, and we'll be talking about some of what we're doing. But just a few background points.

We are 23 members from non-profit organizations, profit organizations, and government agencies that basically serve poor and working poor people. We meet monthly, we always have a quorum, I'm happy to say, and we have a number of standing committees, and then we have some ad hoc committees. At present, we have two standing committees, one that looks at employment assessment, how the Department of Labor and the Department of Social Services are preparing people to move to lives of self-sufficiency, and the note other standing committee is Child Care, which is critical, we believe, to helping people move to lives of self-sufficiency.

Our goals for 2011 are carrying over into 2012. We continue to look at staffing, which we consider critical to both the Department of Social Services and the Department of Labor. We took up and will continue to look at the crisis in funding for our health care centers that provide health care to people

who are underinsured or without insurance, again, often the working poor. We are doing a great deal of unemployment assessments, as I said earlier. I'll speak more on that in a few minutes. Child care. We took up bus service, another critical service for working poor people. If you can't get a bus to go to work, you can't get to work. And lastly, we're continuing this year to look at sober homes, and we've had some incremental success in getting the State's attention. One of the things we have been doing more in the last several years is taking issues that fall upon the County and calling the State's attention to them. So with that, let me say that I believe, judging from what Legislator Romaine was reading, that you've already gotten our report that we voted --

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

(Indicated thumbs up).

**MR. KOUBEK:**

Okay. This past Friday at our Commission meeting, we adopted a report and a letter that is going to be sent to not only each of you, but to the State Assembly people and the State Senators who represent Suffolk County and to Governor Cuomo on child care. We have been working closely with the Department. We saw this crisis coming. They were very helpful in providing us with data, and we're now prepared to go to the next step, which I'm going to let our Chair of the Child Care Committee talk to you about. But note she did receive the report. Commendations to the Clerk's Office. We voted on this Friday and I'm happy to see you already have it. So with that, Kathy.

**MS. LIGUORI:**

Thank you. Thank you, everyone. First, before I get into that report, I'd like to speak to you about some of the things that the Welfare to Work Commission and the Child Care Committee in particular have done the past couple of years, and one of those things that we did was look at child care and Child Protective Services. And we really wanted to find a way to communicate, better communication between the CPS caseworkers and the children that were at risk. So we organized our committee, which consisted of the Department of Social Services, some consultants, which were child care providers, as well as the Child Care Council of Suffolk, and we put together the PCAN training, which we provided to you a report before and the successes of that. So that was a vital piece. And while we -- the Commissioner has recently just touched upon the necessity of the Child Protective Service workers as a public safety perspective. I just want to show you something that is very, very dear to me from that training. And if you look at -- if you look at this picture, you might not be able to see what it is, but if I expand it --

**LEG. BROWNING:**

You just lost your picture.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Wrong picture.

**MS. LIGUORI:**

Oh, goodness. Hold on. Not meant to be.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

And for those that couldn't see, it looks like a bruised knee or a leg, or something.

**MS. LIGUORI:**

It was a burn, it was a burn on a child. And when -- it happened with a grandmother in his care. The grandmother had custody of this neglected child. We called the CPS hotline and they felt that they didn't need to take a report. Through this training we were able to contact the local office of Child Protective Services and get to the caseworker, who, to make a long store short, seemed to have been overworked and couldn't get out there to see him until two days later. We continued to

escalate and two hours later we got to a supervisor level and Emergency Services went out that evening and the child was hospitalized and removed to care. So I implore you to really seriously think about the DSS staffing and the needs to the children and families.

So, with that, we continue on with the funding. And the Child Care Committee recently put together the report and we share it with you. Back in 2008, we were pretty much in the same situation, we had lost money. And it was back then due to roll-overs, it was again one of those allocation formula methodologies that they had changed, one of the four in the six years that they changed to their benefit. We fought, we fought, we fought and we got our money back. And back at that time we commanded upon the State Legislators and yourselves, and I have a copy of the sign-on letter that you all wrote, if you need a copy of it for convenience to write to the governor to request additional funding, which is what we're asking for here.

We talk about -- we've heard about all of the numbers and the cuts and the reasons for needing more, so our report talks about that, but what I'd really like to expand upon is that magic number, that 200%, that 185%, that 150, that 125. According to the self-sufficiency report for New York City, and we can get copies of this report for you, in order for a family, a self-sufficient family like yourself, like myself, a single parent with two children, a school-age child and a preschooler needs to earn \$79,000 a year to be self-sufficient, and that would meet their actual costs, basic needs of child care, food, housing and regular basic expenses in Suffolk County. And at that time gas prices were not at 4.25 a gallon, they were in the low threes; high twos, low threes. And, note in any event, at 185%, that same family, in order to receive a child care subsidy, could not earn one penny more than \$34,281. If I do the math for that same family at 150%, it's \$26,065 a year. At 125 -- I'm sorry. That's a family of two. It's \$27,795, family of three, twenty-seven-seven-ninety-five. At 125%, it's 23,162 percent.

Interestingly enough, in this report, Suffolk County, in order to be self-sufficient, that percentage, if you want to equate that \$79,000 income, is 452% above the federal poverty level, to be self-sufficient here in Suffolk County. So we have to really, really understand the devastation to a family at 125%.

When we went from 200 to 185, I can give you the stories. I'll give you one quick one. A single mother with one child, she's a bus driver. Her little girl now, instead of coming to Tutor Time, rode the bus every single day for eight hours a day, but never was dropped off to school. That's her life.

So our report -- and the numbers are -- what we show in our report is specific. We show that the allocation, including the maintenance of effort, gives you a total of \$30,624,539. Compared to the dollars that we were given back in 2009 and '10, which included the ARRA money at the time, we show a five million dollar loss, but that's not really what we need. We do need -- we do need six, eight, ten. We do, we absolutely do. But it is incredible, and we have this report. We're calling upon the State representatives. We want to send it to the Governor. We asked the local liaison to set up a meeting with the Governor's Office. And, you know, we're working collaboratively with the Department, but, you know, we -- how much more can we squeeze out of the penny, the eye, the tear out of the penny? These people -- Legislator Romaine is absolutely right. So we're calling upon a rally to call -- you know, ask for more money and make sure that Suffolk County receives its adequate share and fair share in comparison.

And in one last note, the average federal poverty standard -- self-sufficiency standard I should say, of all of the counties in the State of New York is 271% percent, and Suffolk County at 452 is second to New York City, which is at 500%. So our State Legislators need to hear the facts and the time is now. So we do have a sign-on letter.

When we went to -- I participated in Advocacy Day with the Child Care Council in March, the end of

March, and we appealed to several Legislators and groups. It was much different, and we were very, very effective. The first meeting we met with three Legislators and we learned that there was a request from the Senate side to add six million -- eight million dollars more to the 96 million dollars to the Governor's budget for child care. Those Senate -- those Assemblymen quickly responded and put the word out onto the floor, and we ended up getting two million added, so that was a good thing. But then, when we met with Assemblyman Thiele, Englebright, Sweeney, I was quickly reminded of the sign-on letter that they wrote for us back in 2008, which I truly believe was part of the success of us getting that increase to the -- back into our block grant. He wrote a letter. We provided them with the samples of the letter back then, and they quickly wrote a letter to Gladys Carrion, the Commissioner at the State, so I have a copy of that, which we probably should include, but we need -- we need everyone's help to call upon them. And everyone's crying, everyone. Every county I'm sure is in the same situation, but this is what makes Suffolk County unique. It's that percentage, and we need our magic number.

**MR. KOUBEK:**

Thank you, Kath. So I'll just quickly go through some of the other points in our report and then we can take some questions. I'm sure you'll have questions for Kathy on the child care.

Last fall, the U.S. Department of Census released some pretty startling information on poverty, and particularly the rise in poverty in the suburbs. And so at that time the Commission decided to do what we're authorized to do under the legislation that created us, and that is we're going to be holding public hearings, one on May 18th, one on May 22nd, and one on June 1st. The title of the hearings is *Struggling in Suburbia, Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County*. And we're hoping that these hearings will generate a report to the Legislature with policy recommendations. And we're going to particularly focus on one demographic group identified by the Census Department last Fall and that is the so-called near poor, the very people we're talking about today who have grown. The census reported about 51 million people that are now estimated in the United States to be near poor, so we'll be focusing on them.

We're pleased to announce that the keynote speaker for the May 18th -- the first of these hearings, which will be here in the Legislative Auditorium, is Trudi Renwick, who heads the Bureau of -- I'm sorry, the Department of Poverty Statistics for the Census Bureau, and she is the researcher who released the data back in the Fall. So she will be kicking this off. We're inviting not-for-profit agencies, we're inviting government officials, and we're inviting people who are struggling to come in and tell their stories, and that will be followed by a report.

We will continue looking at staffing. We were very concerned in the Fall at the proposed staff cuts that Legislator Romaine was referring to earlier, and we're particularly concerned about the impact that these staff cuts will have, if they are implemented, as they apparently are going to be in June, both at DSS and DOL.

We will continue to monitor the health centers. We took a stand last year to stop almost 20 million dollars in cuts and were successful I think in getting about 10 million restored to the health centers.

And a few words on employment assessment. One of the reasons a lot of folks are on public assistance is because they're disabled, and they frequently have low level disabilities that are difficult to diagnose. So, again, I commend the Department. We've worked closely with both Social Services and the Department of Labor now as well to beef up the assessment process as people come into the system so we can identify disabilities, and in so doing, properly place people either in work assignments, educational assignments, or categorize them as not able to work, and, therefore, prevent unnecessary and expensive sanctions. So we've created a flier that will be distributed to every incoming client telling that person what his or her rights are as a disabled person and what services are available to them.

We've taken on the Onondaga Americans with Disabilities Act policy and we're adapting it. We're very close to finishing adapting it for Suffolk County. And we've also worked out a new communications strategy so that not-for-profits who have not-for-profit public assistance clients, but those not-for-profits of case managers will be able to work more closely with the Department of Social Services on those clients.

As I said, we're advocating for Sunday bus service, understanding, you know, the crisis that we're facing, but we will continue to follow that issue.

And lastly, for the last three years, we've been looking at sober homes. You've seen our reports, you know we held public hearings, and, frankly, we've been -- we've become something of an irritant to the New York State Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services that refuses to acknowledge sober homes as their responsibility. And so we helped to craft a -- some policy changes here in Suffolk County to upgrade the quality of sober homes. We helped to craft Legislator Browning's legislation to establish an oversight board for sober homes. And last week, we actually had a -- I would call it an interesting conference call with OASAS, and with the Governor's representatives, and with our folks here, and as a step in the right direction.

In 2008, OASAS said that one of their types of housing that they do oversee, it's called Supportive Living Services Housing, could not qualify as sober homes, and they have reversed themselves in writing. Their Chief Counsel, Rob Kent, said, "Well, now possibly that could qualify as a sober home." So last week Legislator Browning chaired a conference call that was at times frustrating, but at least we got two things. We got the Governor's representative, Jim Introne, to acknowledge that the State's building codes may be trumping local building codes. He's going to be looking into that. And more importantly, we got Rob Kent to do what we had recommended in our report to you two years ago, which is that the OASAS will now look at other counties where apparently these supportive living services housing that's overseen by OASAS, could be used as sober homes. And if they are, how could we get that kind of housing here in Suffolk County.

So that's what we do, and we report to you every year. And, you know, we try to stay with breaking news, as you saw this morning. We did not know the Commissioner was going to testify until late Friday, but we are working with them. And so we're taking child care to the next step, as you heard Kathy say. We're appealing to you and all of the State representatives in Suffolk County and the Governor to come up with that additional funding for child care. So that's what we do, and we'll be happy to take questions.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Quick question.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Thank you. Thank you for your report, and thank you for all that you do. You've done some tremendous work in the past, and I'm sure you'll continue to do tremendous work in the future. I think the bill -- your bill extended the commission to 2020, something like that?

**CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:**

Uh-huh.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Okay, great. Legislator Romaine has a quick question for you.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Very quick. First of all, thank you for your work. As you know, I thought it was important that you

appear today, and this committee was aware of the report that you drafted. Have you any plans to meet with our County Executive to talk to him about this report and speak with him directly to see what parts of this report can be implemented, what parts of this report are important in terms of his policy-making for this County? Have you spent any time with the County Executive or members of his staff regarding this report?

**MR. KOUBEK:**

You're referring now to the child care report?

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Yes.

**MR. KOUBEK:**

Yeah. Yes. Actually, we were -- well, I'll let Kathy elaborate, but we've worked very closely with, actually, the staff you saw this morning in preparing our report.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

All right. That's Social Services. I mean, in the Executive Branch, have you met with the County Exec? Because when you spend the time, effort and energy to do a report like this, I think, five, ten, fifteen-minute opportunity to sit with either the County Executive or his Chief Deputy County Executive would be beneficial. I appreciate you making the time to sit with members of the Legislative Branch at this committee. I also would recommend strongly that you speak to our Executive. I'm sure he has concerns of these issues as well.

**MR. KOUBEK:**

Typically, since we were created in 2003, we report to the Legislature --

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Right.

**MR. KOUBEK:**

And deal with the departments of the Executive. But that's a very interesting thought. Very, very good, appreciate that.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Well, it's just that, you know, we have three branches of government and two of them are involved in policy-making, the Executive and the Legislature. I thought as a courtesy, it would be appropriate, even though you were formed as a Legislative committee, when you do a report of this size and scope that talks to one of the key problems facing Suffolk County and helping people get off welfare and get into work, that the Executive should be included in whatever briefings you perform.

**MS. LIGUORI:**

We will act on that invitation.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Well, I haven't made it. You would have to speak with the Executive. Thank you.

*(\*Laughter\*)*

But he has his representatives here, and I'm sure Ben will go back to our Chief Deputy County Executive and I'm sure she'll carve some time out. Thank you again.

**MS. LIGUORI:**

Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Legislator Browning had a question.

**LEG. BROWNING:**

Yeah, I want to say thank you. I know I've worked a lot with you. Even though I'm not chairing the Committee anymore, there's just some issues that I just can't walk away from. But, again, the State has balanced their budget, or passed their budget I should say, and again shifting the burdens to the County, which is creating our hole.

One of the things that I did some time ago was reach out to the Federal Government and to the State to say, "You know, we're not the same as some county Upstate." Our -- you know, our poverty level -- there should be a regional poverty level. Have you guys looked into that at all?

**MR. KOUBEK:**

Yes, we have. In fact, we've already received as a commission two analyses of the inadequacies of the Federal poverty level. And Trudi Renwick, who is our keynote speaker, that's her specialty, and she's going to go as far as she can within the federal structure to say that the Federal poverty level is inadequate. Now she's already done that, and a lot of us were surprised at the report she released in the Fall, which prompted our hearings, but, yeah.

Our position as a Commission is that -- is in agreement with Adelphi University's Vital Signs Project, which is that the federal poverty level of Nassau County should be 200% of what it is. It should be for a family of four not 20,000 -- \$22,050 for a family of four, it should be \$44,100. That's our position. I mean, the reason why the Federal Government is not doing this is fairly obvious. It will open the door for lots of people who need help to get help. But we keep -- we're going to keep the heat on and public attention on that, yeah.

**LEG. BROWNING:**

It's just that I know when my son was stationed here in Westhampton in the military, wherever you live in the military you get a cost of living allowance. It varies based on where you live with the military, and that's the National Guard, which is the State. So that's why I'm saying why can't the State create a regional poverty level? And again, like you said, then it would force them to have to give more money. But I don't know any other way to solve this problem other than them to do that.

**MR. KOUBEK:**

It's very frustrating. And that will probably be the first question that I will ask of Trudi Renwick, and she'll -- we know the restrictions she works under. But at least she is a researcher and a key position who recognizes that one poverty level for the United States, other than Alaska and Hawaii is, frankly, ridiculous. It's interesting, though. I did not know that the -- you're saying now the allowances for the military are regionalized by cost of living?

**LEG. BROWNING:**

Yeah.

**MR. KOUBEK:**

That makes sense.

**LEG. BROWNING:**

They get what they call COLA, and that depends on where you live what your COLA is.

**MR. KOUBEK:**

Yeah. Good to know.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

All right. Thank you. Thank you for coming in and I'll see you soon.

**MR. KOUBEK:**

Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

All right. Last, but certainly not least, we have Reverend Pearson and his staff, the Human Services.

**REVEREND PEARSON:**

Good morning, or is it afternoon yet?

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Still morning.

**REVEREND PEARSON:**

Still morning. I would like to thank Chairman DuWayne Gregory, Vice-Chair Kara Hahn, Legislators Kate Browning, Lou D'Amaro and Ed Romaine for giving us this opportunity to present our mission, goals and objectives of the Suffolk County Human Services Division, which now incorporates youth, women services and minority affairs. Though we now function as one department, allow me to present each individually as the missions, plans and objectives may vary.

Some of my colleagues are here today with us, the Directors of the Town Youth Bureaus and agencies throughout Suffolk County. Ms. Donna Napoli from Brookhaven; Claire McKeon from Babylon; Nancy Lynott from Southampton; Donna Lewinski -- am I saying it -- Lukowski, I'm sorry, from Riverhead; Karen Haber from Huntington; Joanne Folber from Islip and Patsy Hirschhorn from Smithtown. From the Office of Human Services, Pat Policastro is here, who leads our team with the Youth Bureau. And Grace Ioannidis is here as our representative from Women's Services. Our goal today is to show the need and the relevance of our work, to put a face or faces before you that demonstrate what we do, and to give you a greater and deeper appreciation and understanding of how we contribute to the overall economy of Suffolk County.

Let me start first with the summary of women's services. There are 758,682 females in Suffolk County that constitute over 51% of the population of the County. The mission of the Suffolk County Women's Services is to identify needs, advocate for services to meet those needs, coordinate and develop resources, stimulate awareness and community interests in women's concerns and accomplishments, and provide information and resource -- and referral sources. Our one dedicated staff professional is Grace Ioannidis.

The County Executive's Office of Women's Services has the following responsibilities, and I've listed it all as a -- in our report to you. They act as a liaison between the women of Suffolk County and County Government, they provide and sponsor free conferences, workshops and seminars on health, legal issues and personal enrichment topics. We operate a women's help line which provides information, referrals, peer counseling, resource material on a wide range of topics, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, legal rights, breast health and mammography information. The help line is bilingual, and calls can either be handled anonymously, as well as confidential. We publish a "Resource for Families" brochure which provides a listing of community services and other publications on a wide range of information and educational subjects. The office

also provides informative and educational materials on health issues, sexually transmitted disease, child care, domestic violence, discrimination, substance abuse in many forms.

We oversee a task force to prevent family violence, which explores the problems surrounding the phenomenon of family violence. We identify gaps in services in order to ensure comprehensive county-wide system of quality services that will help protect and ensure the safety of victims and their families and increases community awareness of resources available.

Under the Women's Services there are two boards. One is the Suffolk County Women's Business Enterprise Coalition, and the Suffolk County Women's Advisory Commission, which function as advisories to the County Executive and the Legislature to deal with women's issues and to promote women-owned and operated businesses in Suffolk County.

The mission of Minority Affairs, which is currently just staffed by one clerical person, serves eight boards, including one task force and the two women's groups that I had mentioned, aforementioned. The mission is to address the needs of African-American, Hispanic-American, Asian-American, Museum-American, and other minority residents of Suffolk County. In addition to these cultural boards, there's the Suffolk County Anti-Bias Task Force that seeks to eradicate bias and hate and promote harmony and diversity.

We have established a quarterly round-table meeting of the Advisory Chairs who collectively develop an annual report of findings and recommendations which could impact policy and government regulations. This report would be presented at the end of the year to the County Executive, and the Boards would collaborate on an economic development project to help stimulate growth in our economy.

Let me turn to the focus of our youth. The welfare of children and youth is the foremost concern and responsibility of the Youth Bureau system. Through a comprehensive plan we will continue to create a system which will encourage collaboration and coordination with Federal, State, County, Town, public and private agencies and individuals to produce a youth delivery system to meet effectively the needs of all Suffolk County youth. We will work with our local institutions, colleges and foundations to provide ancillary programs to address community issues, such as drugs, gangs and violence, healthy lifestyles, bullying, economic development, diversity and neighborhoods. The Youth Bureau consists of a staff of dedicated professional technicians, of which you've met Pat, who is our leader, team leader of the staff, who assist in managing 72 contracted agencies. And let me just note that that is down from 182 contracted agencies, along with Town bureaus and agencies offering a variety of youth services throughout Suffolk County. We currently service the entire system, over 145,000 young people, offering preventive and crisis intervention programs, combating such issues as gangs and violence, drug alcohol and dependency addictions, mental health crisis counseling, juvenile delinquency, teenage pregnancy, and much more.

The Suffolk County Youth Bureau in, partnership with the eight town Youth Bureaus, who you've met their leaders today, seek ways to address youth issues concentrating on prevention, recovery and crisis management, drug and alcohol treatment prevention, runaway and homeless, individual counseling, gang prevention, community organization and advocacy, before and after care, cultural activities, support groups, crisis intervention, employment and career preparation, mentoring, healthy lifestyles, anti-bullying, cyber bullying, sports and recreational programs and community outreach. We incorporate a holistic approach to produce healthy young minds towards becoming productive citizens in Suffolk County. The Youth Bureau system works to help our youth deal with some of the biggest and most costly problems in our society. Working to prevent these problems will become a very expensive cost to the County if we are not successful. Research shows that for every dollar invested in education, prevention and intervention, it will save costs for health care, prisons, the welfare system, policing and more.

According to the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, it costs approximately \$263,000 to incarcerate a young person. The Youth Bureau system has a longstanding record of effectiveness in reaching youth and families. This system is seriously at risk due to the yearly budget cuts. The impact of local agencies having insufficient funding, or having to close their doors in some cases, will have a highly negative impact on communities for years to come. Funding prevention efforts through the Youth Bureau system is a smart investment, an investment that we cannot afford not to make if we are concerned with improving the health of our economy.

All over this great county of ours youth workers are doing their part to impact lives that will one day contribute to the health and wellness of our economy, programs like SNAP, EOC, who are here today, which specialize in the education and the prevention of teen pregnancy, programs like Tri-Community and Youth Agency in Huntington, who will testify when I'm finished. In Babylon and Brookhaven, we find a network of youth agencies which work closely, collaboratively and collectively to provide an excellent safety net for Brookhaven youth.

And let me also understand -- underscore, which is not in my notes, the importance of youth courts. We have found that that is a great alternative to incarceration or removing children from their homes. There's been great success found with youth courts. We now have youth courts in Brookhaven, in Babylon, and we also have one in Huntington. And so I just wanted to underscore the importance of youth courts.

In Islip Town, there's the YES Program. In Smithtown there's a Focus on Substance Abuse. In Southold, the Youth Bureau partners with the Town's Anti-Bias Task Force and school districts to address bullying and hate. From this effort, a partnership with the Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County developed anti-bias education programming for high school and middle school students. These programs and others like them contribute to a mission of a sustainable and growing Suffolk County. These are our dollars working at its best.

What are we doing to plan for the future, and how can you help us? The Suffolk County Youth Bureau, in collaboration with the Town bureaus, public and private institutions, such as the Long Island Center for Nonprofit Leadership, Adelphi University, Suffolk County Community College, SUNY at Stony Brook School of Social Welfare, the United Way of Long Island and more to offer our towns and agencies technical assistance in areas to include, but not limited to, board roles and responsibility, fund-raising and fund development and collaboration. We will -- these are our goals and objectives for the coming year. We will assist our agencies with seeking a portfolio of funding opportunities to sustain their programs.

This coming Friday, we have an inter-government meeting of collaboration between the Suffolk County Youth Bureau, Probation, the District Attorney's Office, the Department of Labor, the Sheriff's Department, the Department of Social Services, the Police Department, and other governmental agencies to solicit federal funding through competitive grants, which will also help to provide stable youth programs to Suffolk County Youth.

Thirdly, we will establish a new system of eligibility for funding agencies. This knew criteria would establish specific goals, objectives and measurable outcomes for specific targeted groups such as at-risk youth, etcetera.

Fourth, enhance the current Suffolk County budget process by seeking alternative means of supporting the Youth Bureau budget by establishing collaborative, with targeted Federal and State government agencies to include, but not limited to, the Department of Justice, the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services.

Finally, we will work collaboratively on a Suffolk County project to promote economic empowerment and also to address gangs and violence. We ask the Legislature to work closely with us by first assigning a Legislative appointee to attend the quarterly Youth Board meetings to keep each of our Legislators abreast of pertinent issues concerning our youth. As we move forward in the budget process, we ask that you please give strong consideration of the importance and relevance of these youth workers, these faces who you see today, and how we can help to contribute to the overall goals of a healthy economy.

Thank you for giving us this time, and, please, do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Thank you. Thank you.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Question.

**REVEREND PEARSON:**

And we do have a few others who will give quick, brief presentations --

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Okay, sure.

**REVEREND PEARSON:**

-- if you want to do that now and then --

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

We could do it now. Is this Donna Napoli?

**REVEREND PEARSON:**

Yeah, Donna Napoli --

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Napoli. Sorry if I mess up.

**REVEREND PEARSON:**

-- from Brookhaven Youth Bureau will offer, as well as Debbie Rimler from the Tri-Community Organization from Huntington. She is the Executive Director. They will offer --

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Okay. Thank you. You just have to hold the button and state your name for the record.

**MS. NAPOLI:**

Thank you again. I'm Donna Napoli. Is that going through? Yes. I'm Donna Napoli. I'm from the Town of Brookhaven's Youth Bureau. I'm the Acting Director there. And I'm really happy to be here this morning. Thanks so much for having us. Wow. Health and Human Services Committee, tough job, tough job in these times. And I know that so many of us come before you pleading in some ways. But, truthfully, the system is a little bit in chaos at this point, as you know. The State Aid cuts that keep coming down to you Youth Services have been debilitating, not unlike what you've been talking to -- about before with DSS. Truthfully, in the last 25 years or so, youth services has been cut about 65%, State Aid, and we have been very, very fortunate that up until recently, the County and the townships have been able to keep putting in, keep putting in, at least help us to maintain and do more with less, do more with less, do more with less. Thankfully, we've

been able to do that. And all of the Youth Bureaus, all of the not-for-profit youth agencies, all of you know them, I know. You go to the -- you might go to the local youth agency and see a project or a program there.

And I think, frankly, that we have all been so busy doing a great job with kids, that we may not have done our best job in advocating for ourselves and in educating people about how we are all connected, how the dollars come down, and that's something over the last several years under the direction of the Youth Bureau we're really trying to improve. So there is an Association of Youth Bureaus, and here on Long Island, what we've done is we've really been getting together, and we're trying to make the time, even though we don't always have it, because we're doing things with the kids, but make the time to be sure to raise our profile a bit.

And so part of being here today is such a great opportunity. We appreciate this chance. We don't get a chance, I guess, to tell people enough about what we do, because I don't think the cuts would be coming down this deeply. And, truthfully, we're on life support, as has been said in the past. Many of the youth agencies, there are several in Brookhaven alone that are scheduled probably to close their doors in the near future. In our township, unfortunately, just like in the County, the trickle-down cuts, the Town is having a fiscal crisis. And when they had to make some quick cuts, they did it kind of quickly and kind of deeply into youth agencies. In Brookhaven, we lost \$400,000 to our youth agencies last year, and it was not well thought out or well planned out. And so one of the things that we're all very committed to doing is we know we have to cut and we've been cutting, is we would like to keep having our voices involved, and when committees like yours have to make decisions, hopefully, the Youth Bureau will have a big voice and have some say in how it's down.

Quite frankly, in Brookhaven alone, our Youth Court right now, sadly, it started out all State funded, and you know how the burn money is, it dried up after several years and the Town was able to put in, and Boys and Girls Club of Bellport helps run it. Unfortunately, last year, when the Town was in big trouble, they actually cut the Youth Court out completely, the \$50,000 that they supported it with. Luckily, with lots of advocacy, they put back 25,000, but just like here at the County, July 1st, right now, Brookhaven's Youth Court will close. Now, they are actively fund-raising and everybody's scrambling around looking for grants.

And I just wanted to mention that a lot of the -- I think a lot of people don't realize that a lot of these agencies do fund-raising. I think there's a misperception that the not-for-profits, you know, rely only on government, and that's not the case. It's just that the cuts have been so swift that they're all a little off balance right now.

So, truthfully, what am I here to say? First of all, thank you for hearing about us and listening to us. The young people that we serve can speak very well to the services. One of the cool things about youth bureaus and youth agencies is that we see kids who are in lots of trouble sometimes. Some of the programs are very specific, like a young person being adjudicated for being involved in a gang, or a kid who's really very depressed might come to a youth bureau. But what's very cool is youth bureaus also support kids who are kind of on the fringe. We have lots of programs where kids get involved in our communities. You've all seen those kids, the kids that get involved in youth courts, the kids that start out maybe being adjudicated themselves and then serve on the jury at the Youth Court and wind up being a superstar in their Town's Youth Council. They do your community cleanups.

So these programs, they pay off on so many levels. And, truthfully, on a human level, since we don't get to talk about that too much, we have to talk about numbers and figures, but here in the Human Services Committee I'm allowed. If you think back to your own childhood, when you were 12, 13, 14, what did you need the most, no matter what kind of home you came from? You needed to be connected to something. And I think we better be concerned about how many young people

are walking around in Suffolk County with no connections, none. School is a tougher place than it used to be, they're under duress. The youth agencies provide places for kids to get connected. And, yes, they are researched-based programs, and we do all kinds of very scientific things with the kids, but the biggest thing is that kids need a place to be involved, to get connect. Youth bureaus, youth service agencies offer services, and opportunities, and supports for all kinds of kids, whether they're in trouble or not. And many times, kids that come in a little on the fringe wind up being real involved. And I know, Kate, if you think of some of those kids from YMCA and over at Colonial, the same kids that could be your biggest nightmares and being -- costing a lot of money, are now involved, and found out, "Wow, my community cares about me," and they change the community.

So I am just here on behalf of all of us saying that what we do matters, what we do counts. I know that you're under the, you know, duress about money, and, please, to just keep the Youth Bureau involved as decisions are made, and to let you know that we are all working together, much better than we used to, to collaborate and to show -- and to show the power that what we do works, and that there's research behind it. So thank you very much.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Thank you. One more person to speak. Okay. I apologize. I thought this was your staff. I would have invited you guys up a little sooner to speak instead of having all of you government officials wait. I thought -- I see Claire McKeon. I thought she might have come to the County, but she left the Town.

**MS. RIMLER:**

Good morning. I'm Debbie Rimler. I'm Executive Director of Tri-Community and Youth Agency. And, Donna, thank you so much for what you said. I'm here to reinforce that and talk about my small nonprofit in the Town of Huntington, Tri-Community and Youth Agency. I've been Executive Director there for 25 years. I've seen a change over the years from our program, being a simple drop-in program, and what the needs of the community that I serve are to the needs being much more complex and much more far-reaching.

Our agency provides education, recreation, culture counseling and advocacy programs that are open evenings, weekends and throughout the whole year. We're the first step where youth might drop in to one of our centers. We provide after-school homework help, computers, sewing classes, karate classes, three different mentorship programs, swimming with the Y. We collaborate with everybody and anybody that we can, both to save money and resources, and improve the qualities of our programs. We work with the schools, we work with the churches, the temples, the service organizations. We're, in the whole Youth Bureau system, part of a coordinated plan for the Town of Huntington. Two of the centers that I run are in Huntington Station. We've become very involved over the past, I would say, 12 years with the gang issue in Huntington Station. We have a program that's just directly directed to that, which is the {CASS} Program, where we provide intensive case management for youth who are referred to us from the schools. Those youth are in grades 5th grade through 9th grade, and we have a real chance to go into their homes and into their lives and really make some positive changes.

The children -- the youth that come into our centers, they could be from honor roll students to students who are really in trouble, being truant and out on the street at night, and our agency works very hard to turn that around. We work with over 70 to 100 volunteers each year that help us do our jobs. We -- and we're there for the youth. After school, all reports show that between the hours of three and eight p.m. are the times that most youth get into trouble, and those are the hours that our agency runs five days a week and on the weekend. So we might have a youth that comes into a basketball program, and then, as they start to talk to our staff, we're find out they're being raised by a single mom, there might be employment issues, there might be drug and alcohol issues, and we do everything we can to get that youth into the positive alternative programs that a

Youth Bureau provides.

We also go into the schools. We do anti-bullying programs, conflict resolution. There's a program called Natural Helpers, that I can tell you we run in three high schools that has absolutely save lives, suicide prevention, all of it, whatever we can do. And I can give you -- I don't know if I have time to do a quick case. I do?

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Just if you can wrap it up.

**MS. RIMLER:**

I would just tell you about one family, that it was really a poignant example, a dad on his own raising three children. The daughter was referred to us in sixth grade for self-mutilation. We had an intensive case manager with her. We were able to -- and she was also very truant in school. We were able to find out that this young girl loved drama and acting. We got her through this worker into the school Drama Club, into plays. It served as a positive experience for her mentally and socially. We worked with incentive towards school attendance. She went from missing several days each week to one day a month, to no longer missing school. She acts in school plays. Her demeanor is happy, and she is now in honors class, and at the end of the last quarter, received A's and B's. So that's just one example.

And I thank you, and I know your work is hard. And just remember that we're all out there doing more with less for the kids, and anything you could do to help us is greatly appreciated.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Great. Thank you. I'm a little familiar with your program. I know our former Legislator, former colleague, Jon Cooper, was a tremendous advocate for your program, as well as Legislator D'Amaro, going through our budget working group meetings, so -- you had great assistance.

We have -- just before I get to Legislator Romaine, I just want to make a few comments. Obviously, what your work is is tremendous, especially, particularly dealing with our youth, which this success in some ways is harder to measure. Only in -- stating that, because it's hard to calculate what you avoid in future potential costs, through jail and other, you know, types of measures. So the success of the program, I guess, is not necessarily immediate, it's long-term in keeping people out of jail and keeping them in safe places, and productive and constructive environments, and giving them connections to programs.

As a youth myself, I was very active in sports, my brother. We always had that. You know, two working parents, we were on three or four different teams. Our parents were taking us all over the place. So sometimes it's hard to not see that that's not available to every child, and that children are roaming, literally roaming our streets with no activity, and tremendous pressure and influences, negative influences that are available to them. So we thank you as a body for all the work that you do and the lives that you're saving every day, and we appreciate that. Having said that, we -- you know, we are -- have budget issues.

One request that I would like, and I know you're a new Director, when we go through the Budget Working Group, and the budget process, one issue that has come up over the years, particularly the Youth Bureau, for each -- we literally go through the contracts, you know, line by line, and our information that we get I believe comes from the Youth Bureau. I mean, you'll get, just for example, {CASS}, or whatever the program is, and you'll get, you know, who the Director is, how much the grant is, you know, if there's State funding, or is it total County contribution, and a brief description of what the program is, and oftentimes, a lot of those descriptions are similar. So we're at a loss, not being familiar with those programs, as, you know, this program was very similar to

another program, and we make a priority that we want to address certain issues. And it's difficult to do that, because once you make those decisions, it has come back to us, that, "Well, this program really does other things," that maybe we made a priority. So if you can focus on that. I know the County Executive and his staff, the Budget staff, they're going to be -- they're probably starting their budget for next year already. If you can tighten that up a little bit, I guess, because that's been a little bit of a challenge, to say the least. And we know that every program is different. In some ways, it reflects that they're not, so it does a disservice to them. Legislator Romaine, you had a question?

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Yes, I did. Should I say Pastor?

**REVEREND PEARSON:**

Reverend is fine.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

I'd just like to refer to you by the mission that you're called to. My understanding is that the Youth Agency in Suffolk County doesn't provide any direct services. Is that correct, that you act essentially as a pass-through agent for Federal and State funding for localities, towns and local programs; is that about correct?

**REVEREND PEARSON:**

That's correct. But we are expanding that mission so that now we can develop a strategy for Suffolk County of how to service our youth, so we're --

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Right. But you don't provide any direct youth services now?

**REVEREND PEARSON:**

That's correct.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

You just act as a pass-through agent. Because you act as a pass-through agent, one of the ways that you operate is with contracts with local agencies; is that correct?

**REVEREND PEARSON:**

That is correct.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Okay. Are you familiar with CAP, Community Awareness Program of Riverhead?

**REVEREND PEARSON:**

I am.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Okay. I received an e-mail, I think I shared some of it with you, in which they said to me that they hadn't seen any money for 2012. This is an item that was in the budget. Had a contract drafted that they signed, that they would do at this point in the year, \$53,928.79. And I'll read what she ends -- and this is the Director of CAP for Riverhead, ends her e-mail with.

"As we discussed, I was informed by the Youth Bureau that the contracts are being held up by the Chief Deputy County Executive's Office. Any help you can provide me will be greatly appreciated, since we've already paid the expenditures made in January to the present. Thanks."

And the Director signed it to me, and I made an inquiry, and then I found out that, you know, this -- I had to send an e-mail that said, despite the fact this being in the budget, this is a contract that's sitting on the Chief Deputy County Executive's desk that hasn't been executed. Okay? And it reminded me of Health Smart.

Health Smart was a large program that substituted for DARE. I'm sure you're familiar with it, not your department, the Health Department. They had a contract drafted by County Attorney's Office. It was in the budget for 2012. That contract sat on the Chief Deputy County Executive's desk, and the Administration made an internal decision to impound those funds and not to have spend that money. However, no one told Health Smart, so they kept on spending money, because usually counties, there's a layover of a couple of weeks, particularly when there's a new Administration. And one of my questions is, are you, in fact, funding this? Is, in fact, the contract going to be executed? What's happening? Well, end of story real quickly, because I'm a pretty tenacious guy, they are getting funded, and the contract is being executed by the Executive's Office.

What I'd like to know is how many contracts were authorized, how many programs were authorized in the 2012 budget that have been drafted for the recipients, but not executed by the Administration? Now I know you don't have that information today, but I am interested in getting that, because one of the complaints I'm getting with greater rapidity is that many of these contracts are just sitting on someone's desk, and, by the way, I don't know if there's going to be a decision that, "No, we're not going to execute it, they shouldn't have spent the money, we didn't execute the contract," although that belies the common practice over the last few -- certainly, the 20, 30, 40 years in Suffolk County with these contracts.

So my question to you, sir, for which I expect, hopefully, an answer within the next week or so, because I understand it requires some research, how many contracts were authorized by the 2012 budget that have not been executed by this Administration? What are the amounts of those contracts, and what are the agencies involved? And are, in fact, these contracts going to be funded? Or, if they're not, has someone at least had the common courtesy to pick up the phone and tell the agencies, "Despite the fact you're in the budget," like Health Smart was, "we're not going to fund you, we're not going to execute the contract." I'd like an accounting of that because I think that agencies are due that courtesy. I appreciate that. Thank you very much.

**MR. POLICASTRO:**

As of today, there are six agencies that are outstanding that haven't been signed. They went up to the County Exec's Office on April 6th. So every one previous to that has been signed and executed, and I have those today and they will be processed today.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

You understand my concern, because there were -- there were contracts signed by recipients that were sent up to the Exec's Office, such as with Health Smart, that was in the budget that decided unilaterally, without consulting this Legislature, or even consulting Eastern Suffolk BOCES, which is the contractor, that they weren't going to do it, that they were impounding the funds. Now, I'm sure there's a budget rationale for that explanation, but transparency wasn't foremost in their mind, because I had to find out about it through e-mails that were sent to my office. I was not made aware of this. Then I get this from CAP, and I'm saying, "What's the story here? It's April." I want to find out what delayed those contracts.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Okay.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

You're talking about all the good work you do. The first object of any government administration is

proper administration.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

All right. We got -- you made your point.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

But I do have a quick question. For those six contracts based, on the law that I drafted, contracts were supposed to be signed by February 1st, unless there is insufficient paperwork, and all that stuff. And I know that there was a report sent to the Chair of Budget and Finance, which I'll look at, but excluding any of the exemptions within the law, the contract should be signed and not be held by -- held up by the Administration.

**MR. POLICASTRO:**

Right. These contracts were delayed by the agency themselves. We -- all our applications go out at the same time in November. These are on the -- because of living wage, or what have you, problems with the agency itself that the process slowed down.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Right. Okay. And that happens. Legislator Browning had a question.

**LEG. BROWNING:**

Well, I was going to ask you the same question. However, Colonial Youth in my district was one of them. And I believe, in conversation with her, that she made sure that she had her paperwork in on time, and everything was done in order to make sure that she would get her money in time. But now you're telling me that it was the agencies' faults?

**REVEREND PEARSON:**

Well, she's not one of the six that he's referring to. Her --

**LEG. BROWNING:**

Okay. But her paperwork has not been signed either.

**REVEREND PEARSON:**

Her contract has been signed, and we are, as a priority, getting those out. There were 17 contracts. To answer Legislator Romaine's question, there were 17 contract that were being reviewed, and those 17 contracts have all been signed, and we are on a priority basis processing them. The six that he's referring to are six that came in later.

**LEG. BROWNING:**

Okay. When was her's signed? Because I know it was about a week ago I spoke with her and she had no information. And the fear was she now was no longer making payroll.

**REVEREND PEARSON:**

They were signed on April 12th.

**LEG. BROWNING:**

Signed on April 12th. Okay. But again, I -- the concern of mine was, is were -- you know, what was the holdup? And when she gets to the point and she's calling me, and I know my office has reached out to you, that her paperwork's not been signed, she's telling me she can't even pay her employees, that's not good.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Okay. Thank you. Good luck. And we look forward to working with you. Thank you all for all that you do.

We do have one bill on the agenda, it's under Tabled Resolutions, and we'll get to that now, and it's ***I.R. 1072 - Enhancing safeguards at sex offender emergency housing facilities (Schneiderman)***. I'm going to make a motion to table.

**LEG. BROWNING:**

Second.

**CHAIRMAN GREGORY:**

Second by Legislator Browning. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? ***(Vote: Tabled 4-0-0-1 Not Present: Leg. D'Amaro)***

Thank you. And we stand adjourned.

***(\*THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 12:15 P.M. \*)***