HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

OF THE

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

MINUTES

A 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 February 25, 2013.

MEMBERS PRESENT:
Leg. DuWayne Gregory, Chairman
Leg. Kate Browning, Vice Chair (not present)
Leg. Thomas F. Barraga (not present)
Leg. Albert Krupski, Jr.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:
George M. Nolan, Counsel to the Legislature
Renee Ortiz, Chief Deputy Clerk of the Legislature
Robert Lipp, Acting Director/Budget Review Office
Joe Muncey, Budget Review Office
Charvon Pierce, Aide to Leg. Gregory
Margaret Bermel, Director of Health Administration/DHS
Thomas Vaughn, County Executive Assistant III
John O'Neill, Deputy Commissioner/Department of Social Services
Linda O'Donohoe, Assistant to Commissioner Blass
Richard Koubek, Chair/Welfare to Work
Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair/Welfare to Work
Nina Leonhardt, SCCC/Employment Assessment Committee/Welfare to Work
Barbara Egloff, SCCC/Eastern Suffolk BOCES/Welfare to Work
Don Friedman, Empire Justice Center/Touro Law Center
John Stype, Aide to Leg. Krupski
Michael Pitcher, Aide to Presiding Officer
John Bogark
And all other interested parties

MINUTES TAKEN BY:
Diana Flesher, Court Stenographer

THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 10:03 AM

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Good morning everyone. Welcome to today's Human Services Committee meeting. Will all please rise for the Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator Krupski.

SALUTATION

Okay. Today we do not have a quorum so we will not be taking action on the legislative agenda, but we can and will go to the Public Portion and the presentation.

PUBLIC PORTION

We do have two cards, the first card being John Bogark. Am I pronouncing it right?

Just for the record, Legislators Browning and Barraga have excused absences.

Good morning, sir.

MR. BOGARK:
It's John Bogark. Thank you. Do I have three minutes or five minutes?

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Three.

MR. BOGARK:
Three, okay, so I'll move along pretty quickly. My name is John Bogark. The reason I'm here today is about an issue in Child Protective Services.

Let me just explain something about my background so you have an idea where I'm coming from and it's this background. I retired from the Department of Social Services last year after 39 years of work in the Department of Social Services. I began as a caseworker in 1969 in Children's Services, which was the precursor to CPS. I spent approximately 25 years working as an Investigator for Child Protective Services. I retired in 2000; came back in 2003 as a consultant and worked for nine years helping the Department close cases. So I do have some background in Child Protective Services matters.

What brings me to the podium today and out of retirement is an article that appeared in Newsday regarding the debate on disclosure. I don't know if any of the members of the Legislature saw this article. It relates to two child fatalities here in Suffolk County. In one case the perpetrator's been arrested. In the other case the perpetrator still remains unknown and those cases are under investigation.

Newsday has requested information about how and if Child Protective Services was involved in either or both of those cases. And the Department has taken the position that confidentiality laws prevent them from disclosing that information to Newsday or any other media agency ear.

I want to tell you that as a member of the public and a former member of Child Protective Services, I'm in total disagreement with that view. I think that these children deserve to have a proper investigation conducted. And all the circumstances about how they came to their fate need to be discovered by the government -- this -- Suffolk County Government so that really there is little bit of closure to the events that occurred here.

This article, if you haven't seen it, it's a wonderful article. It really lays out some of the issues here

including why there is some protection for children in terms of disclosure of information and how over the course of the last five or six years the Department of Social Services on a State level, and now it appears on a local level, has been moving to try to cut off information to prevent investigations about what might have occurred in these instances.

Look, maybe everybody did the best they could and these deaths occurred despite the best efforts of CPS, but I don't know. You don't really know. And that's the point. As in other instances where children have died and investigations have occurred, then, we knew. And then individuals like yourself, policymakers, could make decisions about what was then best to do in the future for the protection of children. I urge the Committee to begin its own investigation of these matters and find the truth. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Perfect time. Okay. Next card is Kathy Liguori or are you -- going to be part of the presentation, too, Kathy; right?

MS. LIGUORI:
I was going to be speaking about the resolution but if it's --

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
You can speak about it just for the record. Sure, come on up. I see, IR 1001.

MS. LIGUORI:
Yeah, I can wait until the next time when you have --

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Okay. It's up to you.

MS. LIGUORI:
I'll wait.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
The world is your oyster. We're waiting. Okay. That's all the cards. Anyone else that would like to speak, please come forward, state your name. Okay. All right. Thank you.

PRESENTATION

We will go to the presentation, Dr. Koubek and the Welfare to Work Commission.

Good morning, Dr. Koubek. If I could just have you all state your names for the record so the stenographer can get it. And just let me apologize. It's more of a reflection upon my personality than yours that we don't have a quorum today, but we certainly welcome you being here. We appreciate the efforts that have been put into the report. We -- I certainly, and Legislator Krupski anticipate, you know, hearing your presentation. So, thank you all for being here today for this very important presentation.

DR. KOUBEK:
Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We welcome you back as Chair of the Committee and look forward to working with you for another year.

My name is Richard Koubek. I'm Chair of the Welfare to Work Commission of this Legislature. We'll go this way.

MS. LIGUORI:
My name is Kathy Liguori. I'm the Vice Chair of the Welfare to Work Commission and Childcare Committee Chairperson.

MS. LEONHARDT:
Good morning. My name is Nina Leonhardt and I am a member of the Welfare to Work Commission. And I also serve on the Employment Assessment Committee.

MS. EGLOFF:
Good morning. I'm Barbara Egloff. I'm also a member of the Welfare to Work Commission and I sit on a couple of committees. I also represent Eastern Suffolk BOCES.

MR. FRIEDMAN:
Good morning. I'm Don Friedman. I'm a member of the Commission and I'm with the Empire Justice Center, Long Island Office at Touro Law Center.

DR. KOUBEK:
Good. So, thank you for this opportunity. In December -- late December every member of the Legislature received our report and will be meeting with individual committees over the next month. Our purpose, frankly, is to try to flush out -- it was a complex report. It was a long report. So we'd like to sort of pick some of the salient points and perhaps have some dialogue. And so let me begin with why we got into this report.

In the Fall 2011 the US Census Department released what we thought was some pretty startling data that showed a dramatic increase in the number of suburban poor people across the country. And so that prompted our Commission charged to advise you on contemporary issues related to poverty and policies. It challenged us to look into this.

So we planned public hearings. And in 2012 we had these hearings. The title of the hearings became the title of the report. "Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County." And poverty in Suffolk County many folks think as an oxymoron, that we don't have it. So one of the reasons why we wrote the report was to elevate the fact that we do have poverty. And one of the reasons we're taking the time now to meet with the Committees is to keep -- keep the conversation going.

Between May and October we had received 20 hours of testimony on what it means to be poor in Suffolk County. 102 people spoke to us in four hearings and two focus groups. And these folks were government officials, agency heads, representatives of various organizations and academic experts and poor people themselves, people who are struggling.

Among the surprising facts about poverty what we uncovered, despite the fact that we're one of the wealthier suburbs in the United States, which is why when people talk about suburban poverty in Suffolk, or Nassau for that matter, there's a sort of pullback, like, "it can't be that much."

And if you look at the Federal Government's definition of poverty, which my colleague, Don Friedman, will be talking about, we're doing pretty well. They define poverty for a family of four as $23,050 a year as annual income. And using their definition, the official federal definition, our poverty rate is only 6%. And the national poverty rate, to give you a comparison, is 15%. So the suburban myth holds, *we don't have any poor people.*

What we found in listening to these 102 people and doing our research -- and among them, by the way, was the head of the Poverty Bureau of the US Census Department who came up and spoke to us in this very room -- she was the keynote speaker -- we're in a county where one of the folks who testified from the Long Island Association, Pearl Kamer, their chief economist, she said to pay your

basic bills in Suffolk County, you need $75,000 a year for a family of four. That's a striking number. That's to pay basic bills. That's not to go on vacations and to go out to restaurants. That's to pay for your childcare and your gasoline and your mortgage or your rent or whatever. It's such a controversial number, that one of the news media, when they heard her report back in May of last year, they wanted to do a story; but one of the editors said "we can't print that. That can't be true, that we require a $75,000 income." And the answer was, it is true; and they went ahead and published it.

And if you look at other measures, like the self-sufficiency study, it's even higher for a family of four depending upon the ages of the kids, could be in the low eighties, 82, 84,000. So that's the baseline. That's what you need here to get by.

So in consulting with the Census Department and looking at the realities of Suffolk, the Federal Government says you're poor if you're earning 23,050. The reality is you're poor if you're earning 46,100, twice that amount in Suffolk County. That's poverty. And then suddenly the reality crashes in; because then our poverty rate goes from 6%, the Federal definition, to 20%, one in five. In fact, we found, again, consulting with the Census Department, there are 178,000 people in Suffolk County who are earning between 23,000 and 46,000. They're the so-called working poor. The Census Department now calls them the near-poor. One of the experts we consulted, {Catherine Newman}, she calls them the "missing class." They earn too much to be officially poor so they can't get government support, but they earn way, way too little, 46,000, to pay bills. And they don't qualify for most government support.

You'll be hearing, for example, about one critical support. And you've heard it from us before: Childcare. And I think the key point about these 178,000 people is they work. These are not people on Welfare. They earn too much to be on Welfare. They don't want to be on Welfare. They work, but they can't pay their bills. So we looked into them. We looked at them. We heard from them. And we had -- you know, we came up with a couple of conclusions. You'll hear in a few minutes. The Federal poverty definition is ridiculous. And I'm going to let Don Friedman talk about that.

In addition to the near-poor, we found another class of people who have now been called the new-poor since the Great Recession. Hard to pin down the numbers but they're out there. These are people who are middle class and have slipped into poverty over the last four years because they're unemployed, their unemployment benefits ran out and they're beginning now to sink into a status -- really sad stories we heard, where one family who spoke to us, again, in this room in May, had been contributors to their local parish outreach food pantry. They now became users of -- you know, they had to go in -- they were once donors. They now had to go in and get food there.

The other thing we found is that these folks, the new-poor, the near-poor, the very poor, they're in just about every community; just about every community. And you can find them, by the way, by simply looking at the kids who are receiving free or reduced lunch -- price lunches. Almost every community has them. We just don't recognize them. And they're afraid to speak up because they're ashamed.

We found that poverty takes a heavy toll -- and we have sections on, you know, the people most victimized. People of color, for example; people with special needs and vulnerabilities; children, terrible toll; some senior citizens and people with mental and physical disabilities. So we sort of pulled them out and took a look at the special suffering. But the thrust of the report is the working poor. These people who go out, they contribute to society, they work two or three jobs. And they're cut off from most government supports. And part of the reason is because the government policy says 23,050, that's the magic number. You're over that, you're on your own basically.

So what happens to them? We found some of them have to go on Welfare costing us a fortune. Some of them don't even want to work. It's not worth it to work. And for some of them, they just

have to face these constant, constant barriers that wear them down, barriers like the lack of healthcare, public transportation; just getting to work, getting to work, for example, on a Sunday if you're a working poor person, if you're a home health aide and you're earning 8, $10 an hour and you gotta get a taxi to go to work, because we don't have Sunday service, that kind of thing just grates and tears these folks down. The lack of childcare, the lack of affordable housing. And as you'll hear in a few minutes, the lack of education and training that prepares them for our job market; not low wage jobs, but self-sufficiency jobs.

I think for me personally one of the most troubling things we found is that these families and their kids are permanently trapped into poverty. I think you know, Mr. Chairman, I used to be a teacher and we used to have a tracking system. Schools have begun to move away from that. And you could see -- and I was in Plainview, which was a middle class community, but you could see the kids who were going to be trapped forever into -- into all kinds of problems. That's what's happening to these 178,000 people. They're trapped and their kids are trapped into lives of insecurity.

The problem is not really created here. The problem that you have to face as Legislators is created in Washington and Albany. The rules are rigid. The rules are inflexible. And what really we found very frustrating is the rules to access government support are often based on this assumption: You got to make it tough for people to get Government services and support, because these people are basically lazy. And if we provide them with support, they're not going to want to work. That's the assumption.

You know, if you looked at the title of the so-called Welfare Reform -- Federal Welfare Reform in 1996, it's the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act -- that's the full name of the Act. And what does that suggest? That these people who need help are irresponsible and don't want to work. So -- and, by the way, we found the opposite. When you're talking about working-poor, they're working. And we found in so many of them, particularly when we had focus groups, they're ashamed that they're poor. Because they know, you know -- so the image of suburbia is they're not supposed to be poor. And if you're poor, you've done something wrong. So they kind of sneak into food pantries. And they don't want to talk publicly. That's why we held the focus groups, Mr. Chairman, we realized that some came forward to speak here. Many would not. We had to have more intimate settings where they could actually open up about their struggles.

And the reality is that it's not an issue of lazy -- everybody makes bad decisions. Some of the folks we're talking about have made bad decisions. But there are structures and systems that we heard about and that you know about, you know, we all know them. Just look at the school system. In 124 school districts on Long Island, segregated -- the third most segregated suburb in the United States -- so these communities, these school district segregated by class, segregated by race, and those segregated districts have all kinds of funding problems which then lock these kids into a lifetime of poverty. So we're talking systems as well as personal decisions.

So what do we do? I mean, you're boxed in as a Legislature with rigid rules based on many cases on a false premise. These people, if you help them too much, they'll be -- their laziness will get worse. So what do we do when you're facing these restrictions on yourself? Well, part of it, the solution is to encourage the private charities who have done a great job -- I used to work for Catholic Charities. I know what they did. And we have charities who are represented on the Commission. They do a great job. Part of the problem is they're not funded properly to do it and they can't do it. The government has got to step in to look at these people and say "what can we do for these 178,000 struggling people?" And then, you know, you're sitting there as one Legislator -- one Legislator was asked by you, "would you come and listen to the hearing out in Riverhead?" And this Legislator said "why? We have no money." So what do we do?

So we looked at this. And we had -- we had disagreements within our Commission. What do we do? And we decided to follow the recommendations of your Budget Review Office. There are things

that can be done at the County level despite all of the unfunded mandates, all of the restrictions, all of the problems you face and the deficit you face, there are things that you can do and say here's what we found from the Budget Review Office. They have called for a quarter cent sales tax increase. So we're suggesting to you, easy for us to do, we don't have to stand for election, but we're suggesting to you that you in 2014 take up that recommendation for quarter cent sales tax increase. That would yield $70 million.

We also looked at the General Fund. It hasn't been raised -- hasn't been increased in nine years. We took a very careful look at it. And I actually had to look at it several times. You know, I've been paying my tax bill for a long time in Suffolk County. I never really read it. I don't think most people do. I actually read my tax bill and broke out the General Fund. It's tiny. So that when we consulted with Gail Vizzini, who was then head of the BRO, and I asked her, "well, what would the increase be if we raised the General Fund by 2% yielding a million dollars that could be used to help these folks we're talking about?" She said "two dollars." And I said "you mean, two dollars per $100,000 of assessed valuation?" She said, "no, two dollars for the year." Two dollars; cup of coffee.

So we're recommending in 2014 that you take seriously increasing the General Fund by 2%, you know, the State cap. And this will yield $71 million. And of the amount, we're suggesting you apply 50 million, or 21%, to specific recommendations. And I'm going to give you a couple and my colleagues will talk about others. But here's the deal: If we don't recognize we need to help these people, then nothing's going to get done. If we don't help these people, they can't contribute to the larger economy, they become a drain on the economy. Some, as I said, will actually go on public assistance, which then becomes an enormous expense. So it's in our collective interests to assist them with the support they need to keep them working.

So how do we do that? Well, one thing we found, and actually we've been studying for several years on the Commission, is that the demands on the Department of Social Services in particular have increased exponentially since the Great Recession. If you look at the various categories of aid like -- they provide Medicare, food stamps, the range of increases between 2008 and 2011, the increases in the caseloads have gone from 39% increase to 109%. That was food stamps. In just those four years. And yet they lost 41 staff. Plus they have vacancies. So we're recommending of the 15 million, you put back those 41 staff. You can't have, no matter how efficient the staff is, you can't have those kinds of increases in demand and have decreases in staffing plus vacancies.

We also took a look at the budget recommendation -- and by the way, the Budget Office said that not doing this, not restoring those staff, this is a quote from the BRO -- "burdens the department overwhelmed with mandated responsibilities."

The other Department we were calling for staff increases -- restorations, really, is Health. Forty-five positions -- I'm sorry -- it was 45 in Social Services, 41 in Health. Here's what the BRO said about Health. "The staff reductions in the Health Department have forced the Department to change its focus from prevention, early detection to response mitigation, which reduces the capacity for people to come into the centers and results in longer waiting lines." And by the way, when you cut prevention, you're really encouraging the spread of all kinds of problems, as we've seen with the flu, for example. Uninsured people can't get into the health centers, don't get the flu shot. And then you know what happens at school and at work.

So we're calling for those restorations. We're calling that some of this money be used to properly fund the non-profits. We're calling for expanded bus service. Actually this 15 million would provide Sunday service and evening service. We're calling for more oversight of the Industrial Development Agency that's been in the news. You know, we looked at this last year. The IDA, there are some of them that provide grants. The companies are supposed to create jobs and they don't; more oversight. We're calling for a Human Rights Commission attorney to look into the Fair Housing

Laws, which -- because of the violations that perpetuate the segregation. And one other thing. We're calling for the expansion of affordable housing, which the County's doing a good job.

So there are other recommendations, but basically we're saying to you that these 178,000 people are struggling. It's a personal story of -- it's a tragedy. But it's also a burden on the County. And it's -- it's a system that discourages work. So we think this $15 million investment will encourage work and ultimately lead to a healthier economy.

So, I'm going to yield now to my colleagues who will talk about some of the specific recommendations and then we'll take questions.

Kathy, you want to begin the talking.

MS. LIGUORI:
Sure. Thank you. Once again, my name is Kathy Liguori. I'm the Vice Chair of the Commission and Childcare Committee Chair.

First, I want to thank you all for your support to Childcare, the letters that were written and the various things that were called to action, they've been helpful. And we've had some activity, especially now knowing the County Executive has made childcare allocation change one of the priorities in the State. And we're hearing that also back from some of the State Legislators. So that's good news.

In our report we determined that overall there was a $5.3 million funding reduction by the Office of Children and Family Services over the years. And this led to the loss of subsidized childcare for 2200 children of the working poor families just in the year 2012. Our Department of Social Services has been forced to devastate many working families who rely on childcare subsidies by closing their account.

They decreased eligibility for childcare to 100% or the federal poverty level. They closed subsidized childcare programs to any new working poor families. And some childcare providers were forced to reduce or close their services completely. From a study that we did, it lost -- we estimated that these funding cuts, or these losses for children, led to an estimated 400 layoffs in the childcare industry itself and not the families that were actually working that lost their care. And we estimated based on those 400 layoffs and those cuts that the childcare industry in Suffolk County would lose an estimated $17 million in lost revenues and that would result in a $34 million loss to the Suffolk County economy. So it just doesn't make sense.

In our report we have recommendations. One of the recommendations and foremost is to properly staff the Department of Social Services. Since the last budget cut, the automatic backfill for Child Protective Service cases is no longer in use. CPS caseworkers are overloaded and the children are suffering because of it. Childcare workers are working even harder financially, mentally and physically to provide care. So it's vitally important that we look at that.

We are asking as a recommendation as part of the funding that Dick just spoke about was to increase the County funding to match the $2 million in County funds for childcare added to the 2009 County budget. These funds would be dedicated to childcare subsidies for working poor families who do not receive public assistance. That cost would be $2 million to the County budget. And according to a Rauch Foundation Study, as we know, I've been ringing the hollow bell for years and years and years, that every dollar spent on childcare generates $2 back into local revenues. And every dollar invested ensures that almost $10 in additional funds and additional Federal and State funds are returned to our regional economy. A State reduction will cost the Suffolk County economy, again, I said 400 jobs and the $34 million in 2012. We have to do something about this. A recent article in the Long Island Business News written by economist Martin Cantor noted that

there is the budgetary impression of childcare as a social program rather than an employment program providing assistance for those who are working. And the bottom line is that the State has to help pay for childcare on Long Island. We -- we have to help pay for childcare in Suffolk County. Childcare is not a charity he says. It is a business issue and one that is critical to Long Island's economic development.

We need -- we must create a Childcare Task Force. If you want to leave a legacy, create a Childcare Task Force to coordinate childcare services with the economic development goals of the County in mind. There is no cost to this. The County Executive has made economic development an overarching goal for his Administration. And failure to coordinate childcare services with these plans will undermine the workforce needs of many businesses, and thereby, jeopardize the County's economic development plan. It's critical. And it's about the children who will be our future workforce. With that...

DR. KOUBEK:
So I think you know that what happened with childcare is the Federal poverty level was used as the cutoff. So we were actually providing childcare at 200% of poverty, 46,100, for a family of four. And we're now providing childcare subsidies at 100% or the actual poverty level.

But before we go further into our recommendations, we need to sort of stop and pause. There's not much we can do about it, but we need to understand just how flawed the Federal poverty level is. I'm going to turn it over to Don Friedman for that purpose.

MR. FRIEDMAN:
Thanks. Am I on? Yeah. I appreciate the invitation to speak here.

One piece of the report, the section I was most involved with, helped to write, concerns this sort of technical issue, which is how poverty is measured. It's technical, but it can play out in very important ways. Dick also actually made in his opening remarks -- made sort of the key points, and I'll just provide a little bit more detail briefly.

We're all familiar with the Federal poverty level. That term, it's actually -- technically it's the poverty guidelines that are issued annually by the Federal Department of Health and Human Services. And as we've been saying, there are serious flaws in the Federal poverty level. And these are flaws that are really accentuated on Long Island. And though the flaws are technical, they can have a major impact.
The report goes into some detail on this. Let me just discuss briefly two of the critical weaknesses and shortcomings of the Federal poverty level.

First, it uses a very outdated formula. It was derived in the late '50s, early '60s. And it looked at just one variable. The person who devised it later expressed horror that it had been -- that it was being used to really measure poverty. She just thought it was a quick and easy indicator and shouldn't have been used in this way. But it was based just on the amount that a family spent on food. And then they used a multiplier effect and sort of taken just a number and massaged it somewhat and came up with a poverty level. So because it was based on how much a family at the time spent on food, which was about a third of their income, a low-income family, spent about a third -- and now a family -- a low-income family tends to spend about an 8th of their income on food and the poverty level -- so the poverty level grossly overstates the amount spent on food and dramatically understates the amount spent on, among other things, housing and childcare. So that's number one flaw. The basic formula -- and that formula has not changed. They updated for a price of cost-of-living, but the basic formula has not changed.

And the other huge thing that I think may be -- well, the other major factor that would have major impact on Long Island is that there's no regional variation in the Federal poverty level. It's the same

over the entire continent of the United States. Hawaii and Alaska have a different number, but for the entire United States it's the same -- same level per family size. So as I say the level -- the poverty level for Huntington, West Virginia is the same as the poverty level for Huntington, Long Island even though the cost-of-living in Huntington, West Virginia is about 40% less. But their measure of what's poverty is the same.

There are -- there are alternate measures. And they tend to share certain features and I won't go into detail. There is some more detail in the report. What the other -- the alternative measures tend to do is to look at what we call the market basket of costs. So instead of just looking at one variable, they look at what's the cost of housing, food, shelter, childcare; since often these are families with employment. If there's employment, you got to look at transportation, clothing, etcetera. They look at this market basket to come up with a number.

Number two, another common feature of all these better methods of measuring poverty are that they all have regional variations, by family size and by geography.

And lastly, they all tend to look at resources as they're really available. In some ways the Federal poverty level, although I think it usually dramatically understates things, in some ways it overstates it in that it doesn't count certain types of income, like in-kind support. Like food stamps are not counted even though they, of course, are a real income source to a family.

More importantly, I think it dramatically overstates because it counts as available to a family income and resources that really aren't available. It doesn't look at, for instance, childcare. It looks at gross income and not net. So, again, it somewhat understates and really overstates -- I'm sorry -- reversed. It somewhat overstates but really understates who's really poor.

As Dick said, with the Federal poverty level, a family of four is poor only if their income is under 23,000. By that measure the poverty rate on Long Island is about 6%. Among the suggested alternative measures, some have suggested that the true poverty measure should be 50% of the area median income, or double the current Federal poverty level. And as Dick mentioned, we've had well-grounded and well-supported estimates from Pearl Kamer of about 75,000 for the self-sufficiency standard, and closer into the 80,000s, as what is really needed to meet basic needs. For this reason, that's one of the main reasons our report really tries to look at the poor and the near-poor using higher -- higher multiples of the poverty level or other more realistic measures. And the reality is that a family on Long Island, even at double the Federal poverty level is struggling to make ends meet.

In conclusion, why does this matter? And the answer is that many State and Federal policies including eligibility for various programs, formulas for providing Federal aid to the States, etcetera, are based on the number of people in an area who are living in poverty. And so when that poverty level is distorted, it means that aid formulas as a result are also distorted. And in high cost places like Long Island, we really get shortchanged.

Lastly, I think that something that's equally important, really, or of comparable importance to that -- to the aid impact is ineligibility for programs impact is the impact on the debate. Because when we talked about what a deeply distorted Federal poverty level, or a measure of poverty, when we talk about who's poor, where they are and what's needed to be done about it, we tend to use this misguided -- this now way outdated figure. And that, therefore, distorts the debate in terms of who needs help and how help should be delivered. And, again, in a place like Long Island and Suffolk County, that distortion is really exacerbated and intensified.

So in closing, I would say to the extent that the County must -- does use the poverty level, or must use the poverty level because of State and Federal requirements, it should be done with a very clear awareness of the weaknesses of that measure. And to the extent possible, we need to try to be

sensitive to the fact that there are a lot of people whose income is well about the poverty level who are struggling to make ends meet. Thanks.

DR. KOUBEK:
So -- our Commission, we were founded in 2003. And from the first year we have looked at education and training and policies around education and training as a path out of poverty. You know, that's our goal. Too many of the people on welfare are placed in low-wage jobs and they wind up returning to welfare because they can't make it on a McDonald's job, you know, salary, Walmart. So we have from 2003 on looked at education and training. It's not a surprise that education and training recommendations are featured in the report. So there are two seats on the Commission for the educational community. One is BOCES. That's Barbara. And one is Suffolk Community College. So they will now talk about our recommendations. We'll start, I guess, with Nina.

MS. LEONHARDT:
Thank you, Dick. Am I on?

DR. KOUBEK:
Yeah.

MS. LEONHARDT:
Thank you. As College Associate Dean for Continuing Education, I've been involved with this committee since its inception and with the Commission since its inception. And we are very concerned, of course, with access to education and student success, two of the goals of Suffolk County Community College.

And what I'd like to do is discuss the two recommendations in the report that are aligned with these. Specifically the SWEP placements at the Community College and STEM vocational training. STEM: Science, technology, engineering and mathematics. I'm sure you've all heard an awful lot about that.

Formalized SWEP placement at the Community College at all three campuses began during the 2011/12 academic year. By working with Suffolk County Department of Social Services and the Suffolk County Department of Labor through the Employment Assessment Committee and the Welfare to Work Commission, we were able to develop a formalized procedure and a central office at the College that would serve as the conduit for placing the students and also for certifying their attendance. So that has worked very well, although I would say it's still at a pilot level. There aren't as many students as we'd like to see moving through. So rather than asking for additional money, just emphasizing the program and continuing the fine work that we are doing would be most welcomed.

As we've seen so far, efficiency has been achieved. Students participating in cooperative education, work study as well as those fulfilling the DOL work requirements, follow similar procedures, adhere to the same set of expectations and receive the benefit of career counseling and job readiness in addition to the workplace experience that they get. And the benefit to students in a work study environment have been well-documented through the year, which is why it is supported by Federal Financial Aid.

And I'll just mention few of those. Students become part of the fabric of the institution. They are informed of all student support and cultural activities while gaining work experience. And they rise to leadership positions. There are quite a number of people working in my office today as professionals who started out with me as work study students 20 years ago, 10 years ago, even 5 years ago. And they've completed their education; perhaps they have Masters -- they've earned Masters degrees locally and they've come back and they're giving back. And they are vibrant

participants in what it is we do and they are now peer tutors, peer mentors for the next generation. So it's a really very nice thing.

Their work schedule is built around their course schedule, which is not going to occur at any other SWEP placement. Here we have the luxury -- if they have a two-hour gap between classes, they can report to their worksite on campus and fulfill the terms that they must in terms of their work. So, again, that's not going to happen at a typical worksite. And, of course, everybody at those locations is there to help them. We're all educators. We're all committed to education. So we connect them with the services they need if we can't provide them.

So increased success and encouragement is constant. And what we're going to do at the end of this academic year, we'll work with our committee and do a study to really measure the effectiveness. We know we've improved efficiency. And anecdotally we see the evidence through the years and the evidence of the last year. But I think it's important at this point that we -- we take the time to measure and monitor the effectiveness, which has been part of our goal right along.

By targeting STEM vocational training, students are fulfilling local, statewide and national needs that have been well-documented and was cited in the Long Island Regional Economic Development Council Report that produced many, many millions of dollars for Long Island. Those pursuing careers in these fields will secure employment at a sustainable wage. In addition, critical thinking and problem solving are embedded in this type of training. These are applicable to all employment areas. There are entry points regardless of prior education. We can begin with the GED credential and offer contextualized education related to STEM.

There's a national conference that first began last year and will be offered again this year, the US News STEM Solution Conference. And I was privileged to attend last year and will so again this year. And at this conference the notion of the job market is central. It pointed out that there will be an impending increase in STEM jobs as compared to other jobs and higher salaries that these jobs demand. In 2010 STEM workers earned 26% more than non-STEM workers. The differential is greater for those without a Bachelor's Degree. So for those people that we're talking about who need to go to college, need to earn some sort of a post-secondary credential, if not credit-bearing, they will benefit most from working in the STEM field.

STEM job growth is expected to be sustained through 2020 and, therefore, again, we know this is an area that we should focus on. The County is doing a great job in providing STEM vocational training and we hope that that will continue and perhaps even increase if grants come along. Thank you.

DR. KOUBEK:
The members of our Commission are incredibly hardworking. And in addition to the monthly meetings -- well, you know, you sit on the Commission. In addition to the monthly meetings, we have committees. So the committee that Nina was referring to was our Employment Assessment Committee. And I have one bit of good news for you. It's probably the only good news I've had since we started. And that is that not every one of our recommendations is going to cost money. So as Nina said, there are good programs in place. Our Employment Assessment Committee is going to prioritize these programs and work with the Department of Labor. They sit on -- the Department sits on the Commission and so does the Department of Social Services. So we're going to work as a team to improve, without costing more money to the County, these excellent initiatives.

Barbara, you want to talk a bit also. And there may be some money in your request here, but that's the reality.

MS. EGLOFF:
Well, really not so much as far as money from the County but support from the County so we can receive full allocation for funding opportunities that do come our way, which because Suffolk

County's poverty level is -- looks in the manner in which it does, we do not receive the funding which could be allocated to Long Island, especially in Suffolk County. So that's where your support is really needed.

But just to, you know, piggyback on what Nina said earlier, we already have a lot of these programs that are initiatives through State Ed and also through President Obama in place. BOCES Programs throughout the State, not even just on Long Island, have rigorous, technical curricula that is aligned with numerous colleges and universities throughout the Northeast. And students enrolled in our programs continuously show improvement in their home schools, in their high schools as well. So not only improvement in academics but also improvement in attendance, which makes them more marketable once they are out into the community and into the workforce. They have the opportunity when they complete our programs to take advantage of more than 50 college and apprenticeships articulation agreements throughout the State with an emphasis on trying to keep them here on Long Island so our community continues to grow.

What we need to do to help support that is an emphasis that is voiced so we are not considered to be Long Island's best kept secret. And that's what many people who work for Eastern Suffolk BOCES or who have taken advantage of BOCES programs often say. Now I say that as an Eastern Suffolk BOCES staff member, but you will hear that mirrored throughout the State as well and definitely across Long Island.

Right now we are experiencing some current challenges in declined enrollment in the high school and career technical classes. It's not because of the programs that we offer, but it's because of the fiscal constraints our districts face with the 2% tax gap. And the waiting list for our adult students that are interested enrolling in our adult literacy programs and our adults who are in technical education classes.

Our funding, as I said earlier, in the adult program is very limited, but yet the needs continue to grow. If we're going to prepare students of all ages to become independent and strive as community members, we need your support. We cannot afford to continue to provide the programs that we offer if funding is cut or eliminated. So one solution is to find ways in which we can seek additional partnerships so we can establish new venues and to access additional funding to enhance the funding that is currently available. And, again, so we can make sure that the funding isn't cut or isn't reduced as it has been predicted that it will be, especially in the next coming couple of years. Thank you.

DR. KOUBEK:
I'm just going to conclude the presentation with this: On July 7th the New York Times lead editorial was titled "Struggling in the Suburbs."

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Just use your mic.

DR. KOUBEK:
Sorry about that. Okay, I'll try again. I'm going to conclude with on July 7th last year the New York Times editorial ran a -- lead editorial. The title of it was "Struggling in the Suburbs." And it is based upon our hearings. And the editorial listed a lot of the problems we spoke about. And it said this: "Solving these problems of the working poor" -- "solving these problems must begin with an admission that suburban officials and residents are reluctant to make. And that is poverty is growing and it is not going away. If we don't make that admission, which is what we're trying to do today and with this report, then, we can't solve the problem.

And one last thing. I don't know about any of you, but I stayed up last night to make sure that Daniel Day Lewis got best actor. (Laughter) And I had seen -- I had seen Lincoln just before we

wrote the closing section. So why not end with Lincoln? In 1854 -- I actually -- we heard this from Commission Blass. He quoted Lincoln. And, you know, as a history teacher, I had never heard it.

Lincoln said in 1854, "why not each individual take himself the whole fruit of his labor without having any of it taxed away?" And he answered -- Lincoln again-- "the legitimate object of government is to do for a community of people whatever they need to have done but cannot do at all or cannot do so well for themselves in their separate and individual capacities. There are many such things they can't do well for themselves. Providing for the helpless, the young and the inflicted, is among them." And he concluded in another statement that year "determine that the right thing can and shall be done and then we shall find a way." So that's the report.

I think we've come with up some excellent recommendations. Yes, we used the "T" word. You're going to have to bump the taxes to meet the needs of these people. By not doing so, we believe in the long run will cost more in tax revenue than letting it slide along as we are with these people going deeper into poverty.

So we thank you for your attention. If you have any questions, we'll take them.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Thank you for your presentation. It's an excellent report. Thank you all. You have done a fantastic job. Excuse me. Do we have any questions?

LEG. KRUPSKI:
I just -- you know, I just got that report today. Not having been here in December, thank you for your hard work on that. I mean it's good to hear people who are really passionate about something that -- you really believe in something. It's a lot to take in. And I know, you know, government's a balance. And you quoted Lincoln. And it's a balance between trying to help people who need help and serving everyone. And who gets the -- of course the big question here who gets to pay for that?

DR. KOUBEK:
Right.

LEG. KRUPSKI:
So, thank you.

DR. KOUBEK:
Congratulations, by the way. We look forward to working with you.

LEG. KRUPSKI:
Thanks.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Yes, thank you. There's so much of what you said, and there's so many questions going through my mind, I won't state them all. But I guess the one -- the one big thing that frustrates me is the poverty level. And Don had spoke to this about a regionalized approach. How can you address that in a more effective way? I think I heard something with this whole sequester thing, that there was some consideration of increasing public assistance or something. But certainly how do we give more voice to what I consider -- and I imagine you all as well -- a regional approach to identifying poverty levels and, you know, a regionalized poverty level approach? Would it be writing our Congressmen, our Senators, our Chairman of the Agricultural Committee? What would you recommend?

DR. KOUBEK:
I'm going to Let Don weigh in on it. But I just want to tell you an anecdote. I guess it was the summer of 2010. It was, yeah. And the self-sufficiency standard had been released, the one that

shows that we require maybe 82, 84,000 for a family of four to pay your bills in Suffolk. And there was a press conference hosted by the Health and Welfare Council. And Congressman Israel was there. And he's a very passionate speaker. And he really made a strong case for regionalizing the income tax standards so that -- for example, he was saying, you know, the call for the wealthy earning 200,000 or more, you know, are wealthy and, therefore, should pay more. That's ridiculous for Long Island, because it's really a million dollars on Long Island because of our high cost of living.

So I said to him at that press conference, "well, how about regionalizing the poverty level also? I don't disagree with what you're saying, Congressmen." And, you know, he's a pretty straight guy. And he looked at me and he said "that's not going to happen, period." And -- so, again, we've met with -- the Commission has met with Congressmen Bishop about this. We met with Congressman Israel. It's a tough -- it's going to be a tough call. But I'm going to yield to Don because I know there's work going on at the Federal level that you're involved with. Where do we go with this?

MR. FRIEDMAN:
So after Dick said it's impossible, what can I tell you? (Laughter) No, I mean --

DR. KOUBEK:
(Laughter) Israel said it.

MR. FRIEDMAN:
We moved out of the realm of science and -- social science and moved into the realm of politics. And in the chapter of the -- in the section of the report that talks about this one, as we say, there's ox's that will be gored, if it's changed, right? There'll be winners and losers and so they'll be vehement opposition to a change.

The hopeful sign that's out there -- somewhat hopeful -- is that the Census Bureau has started publishing as part of -- the decennial census now includes an alternative measure. I don't think it's good enough, but it's better. And I think that -- you know, this is an important body and a document that gets lots of attention now has part of it a section that acknowledges the inadequacies of the current measure. That might give a good handle. Because I mean -- this is sort of -- it's just so irrefutable, the injustice of the current measure that maybe that can be used for some Federal level advocacy. I think also just -- unfortunately this will cost a lot -- is for states and localities to independently say "we're going to use a different measure for eligibility for programs. And, of course, in areas where that makes more people eligible, that can get expensive.

But I guess those are the two things I see. One is Federal advocacy using the census, you know, innovation; and the other side is just for independent decisions. Like I think -- for instance, someone said the living wage effort is something that acknowledges the inadequacy of current -- the minimum wage levels. So that's my thoughts on it.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Okay. And you brought up about -- a very good point. Because I was thinking the same thing with the census, I mean maybe -- they go to the majority of homes; you know, a large sampling of homes throughout the country. And the one thing that they repeatedly repeat is that this will bring more monies to your communities because we'll know where the poor people are and, therefore, there's more programs, etcetera, etcetera that are available. Yet when you're looking at poverty programs, it's just public assistance, the reality is -- the realities aren't meeting each other. So it's, you know, again, you get this sense that one Federal department is not communicating with the another Federal Department, which the whole basis, or a big premise of the census, is to track poverty. And it doesn't seem like they're using it. So it just doesn't make sense to me. I think that will be the perfect, at least, foundation or basis for the foundation to look at readjusting or regionalizing the poverty levels.

And just a quick statement. The majority of what you all said on some level addresses education, whether it's childcare, STEM, BOCES, to me that is the key, you know, to break the cycle of poverty. You have to have to, have to, have to educate children, give them opportunities to develop skills that perhaps their parents, previous generations and their family didn't have, give them the ability and the tools to be more self-sufficient. I think it's an investment that's worthy of government; certainly it would help with Federal funds. But I think on a local level where it's going to -- we're going to feel the impact more so than the Federal government because we're going to have to deal with all the ancillary effects of poverty and low-income areas and crime and all sorts -- the substance abuse, the mental health issues. I mean those are the realities that we deal with.

And I think the more we invest in uplifting children and families, you know, it will cost us more in the front, but in the long-term it'll certainly be a worthy investment. And I wish we can do more to address that. I know you've made some recommendations to do that. But as everything, you know, we're going to have to, you know -- not done by fiat, we're going to need the support of the Legislature as well as the County Executive. But I truly believe, and I know my colleagues believe that, you know, that we can do better. And you guys certainly point out a lot of good things for -- food for thought. And I appreciate your efforts.

Is there any final comments that you want to make?

DR. KOUBEK:
I wanted to follow up, Mr. Chairman, on what you just said about the negative impacts of poverty. I recently saw the highly acclaimed documentary about Mayor Koch. It's called "Koch." And I had forgotten -- I had left New York City at that point -- just how much he invested in affordable housing; thousands of units of affordable housing that brought back the South Bronx and some of these areas that had been devastated.

And a number of experts in the film said that the crime rate in New York City dropped dramatically and that a lot of people said *well, it was the tough policies of Mayor Guiliani.* But in fact it was the creation of the Affordable Housing. The investment in affordable housing through bonds changed entire neighborhoods. And once those neighborhoods were changed, you know, the terrible crime waves that we remember back in the '70s and '80s dropped dramatically. So, you know, the long0term benefits -- you're exactly right -- this $50 million, we'll never know the long-term benefits that could accrue. But we need to address it. And as the Times said, you got to begin by acknowledging this is a serious problem. It's here and it's not going away.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Right. And I think you make a very good point. You know, my office sees it all the time. I think if you -- so much can be done if you give a person stability and education.

DR. KOUBEK:
Yeah.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
You know. You can't educate them. You just have to give them the tools or a quality education. And they know that. There's so many students I talked to in low-income areas, *well, my teachers don't care, the quality of education is not great. I really don't have a future.* So there's no stability there. There's no hope of a future. And then you add on top of that the instability of housing. You know, there's so much that these kids have to deal with, that the average kid doesn't have to deal with. So if you stabilize their ability to sustain a quality education and the housing situation, so much would be addressed. I think that that would be a platform for them for success.
So thank you. Thank you all for coming here today and we appreciate the effort.

DR. KOUBEK:
Thank you for your attention and your time. Thanks.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
All right. Okay. That is it. We stand adjourned.

THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 11:05 AM
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