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 December 9, 2013.

MEMBERS PRESENT:
Leg. DuWayne Gregory, Chairman
Leg. Kate M. Browning, Vice Chair
Leg. Thomas F. Barraga
Leg. Al Krupski

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:
Presiding Officer Wayne R. Horsley, 14th Legislative District
Leg. John M. Kennedy, 12th Legislative District
George M. Nolan, Counsel to the Legislature
Sarah Simpson, Assistant Counsel to the Legislature
Terrence Pearsall, Chief of Staff
Diane Dono, Budget Review Office
Renee Ortiz, Chief Deputy Clerk of the Legislature
Robert Lipp, Acting Director/Budget Review Office
Paul Perillie, Legislative Aide
Ali Nazir, Aide to Leg. Kennedy
Rick Brand, Newsday
Thomas Vaughn, County Executive's Office
Marie Berkoski, Aide to County Executive
John O'Neill, Commissioner/Department of Social Services
Linda O'Donohoe, DSS
John Nieves, DSS
Paul Perillie, Aide to Leg. Gregory
Catherine Stark, Aide to Leg. Krupski
Michael Pitcher, Aide to Presiding Officer
Laurie Egberet
Loretta Catalano
Joanne Garramone
Rob Gennari
Ernest Linder
Lisa Lalli
Edward F. Sanders
Janine Winiarz
Delcia Lee
Jennifer Reidy
Karen Baumann
James Semon

(ALSO IN ATTENDANCE - continued on next page)

(Continued)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:
Mary Connolly
Eric McAlister
Michele Brosnan
Keri Giacalone
Eric Delarosa
Brook Faber
Mercy Ferrante
Michael Brosnan
Anna Niola
Joseph Sinatra
Linda M. Linder
Vito DiPietro
Maria DiPietro
Daniel Simon
James E.Bernardo
Maryann Bernardo
Dolores Riconda
La Young Trantom
Al Bento
Margaret Armstrong
Thomas Gilfeather
Nichola DeTomaso
Illegible sign-ins
All other interested parties

MINUTES TAKEN BY:
Diana Flesher, Court Stenographer

MINUTES TRANSCRIBED BY:
Diana Flesher, Court Stenographer
Denise Weaver, Legislative Aide

THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 10:13 AM

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Good morning. Good morning everyone. Welcome to today's Human Services Committee meeting. We're going to get started with the Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator Browning. Thank you.

SALUTATION

Again, good morning. It's good to see you all, that you got here safely considering the weather outside.

We're going to get started with the public portion. We have people -- several people that filled out cards. You will have three minutes to speak. The first person is Laurie Egberet, if I pronounced the name right. And on deck Loretta Catalano.

PUBLIC PORTION

MS. EGBERET:
We've been here several times now. At this point you've taken an oath to withhold (sic) the law. There is currently an illegal shelter that is not legal to operate as a Tier II Shelter. You had a chance to uphold Suffolk's Law of 12 families per shelter. It is your sworn duty to support this resolution and make CHI obey our laws. This was fraudulent right from the beginning. CHI's pricing models is based on 100 families in one place. They never intended to try to obey any of our laws.

If the County wants to talk fair, here are some of the numbers reported by the State. They are available online to anybody who wants them. Before the shelter we were number 8th, 38th per 1,000 students to homeless ratio. We stand to become number two behind William Floyd. There are 1,000 students ratio that were 46 districts with ten or less; 32 districts with less than ten students for the last four years average. Hauppauge was not one of them; 35 districts with less homeless than us to start with. There could be 69 districts by the time you're done with us with less homeless than us. School Districts could be destroyed with just 20 out-of-state special needs students. This would cost the district over $1,100,000. High school electives will be cut; gifted and talented programs gone. What is going to be next?

We cannot already afford preschool for our Hauppauge students. What will we have left after you're done destroying us?

I will go back to my first point that you took an oath to uphold the law and to help protect us. Please vote to support Legislator Kennedy. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Loretta Catalano? And on deck Joanne Garramone.

MS. CATALANO:
Hello. My name is Loretta Catalano. I've been in Hauppauge for about 35 years. I love Hauppauge. I love its community and I love all of Suffolk County. And I'm really concerned because I want this proposal supported because I think it's unfair to any community, not only Hauppauge but any community that's asked to have a mega-shelter in their borders. It's unfair to the people that you're housing. Okay, today I can tell you that I personally have seen in the middle of the night at the shelter on Moreland, women with young children crossing Motor Parkway because they have no

places in their facility to cook. And they're crossing at 11:00 at night in the freezing cold weather with strollers and little children because you have not set up proper homes for them. Okay?

You want to say that you want to support homeless children and families? I'm in favor of supporting them, but support them by 438. 438 Chapter (sic) says that you cannot alter the neighborhood, the -- let me see, I'll read it. Hold on. Alter the neighborhood or the character. And the potential to have these mega-shelters in Brentwood, in Hauppauge in less than two miles of each other and then have these women and children walking around with no place to eat -- because you don't really care about housing them and having a good home for them. You're just interested in making sure that you put them somewhere.

If this is an emergency measure, then close these shelters and put them in proper places. And don't burden one community with 100 families in one place. This is a potential for a lot of neighborhood danger and a lot of danger to these people. And it's very unfair when we have laws to protect us that you're going to sit here and tell me that you're not in support of something. And I'm not saying move these shelters to another community. I'm saying close all of the shelters that have more than 12 people in them. And close all of the shelters that are within that radius that is by law two miles for -- for shelters.

So please do what you were voted to do; or I believe we will find that people will vote you out because we're not in favor of turning Suffolk County into a place where we have projects where people will not want to come and live. My School District is a very good School District but it's small and we need to protect it by disbursing these families throughout Suffolk County. If it's an emergency measure, please make sure that it's temporary and that these places are closed. We're not looking to make the homeowners of these -- the owners of these facilities rich by putting these people in there and forgetting about the people who live in Hauppauge. Please protect them and protect us.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Please wrap up.

MS. CATALANO:
I'm done. Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Thank you. Joanne Garramone and Rob Gennari. Genneri. Genneri.

MS. GARRAMONE:
Good morning. My name is Joanne Garramone. I reside at 22 Butterfly Drive in Hauppauge. My husband and I have been raised in Commack since the late '50s. And I lived in Hauppauge for the last 28 years. We chose this community for its quaintness, its good schools and felt it was a good place to raise our children and live in our golden years.

As you have heard -- as you have heard here today there are many homeowners concerned about moving -- about moving large quantities of homeless families into our community. It's outrageous to think about adding more homeless to Hauppauge by having a mega-shelter to facilitate large quantities of homeless families. The key word in my last statement is large quantities. You've heard many objections today. And I agree with my neighbors' opinions.

My concern is that by introducing large quantities of homeless into our community, it does come with a price. In the State of New York for some reason there is no drug testing for families on

welfare. All communities in Suffolk County are presently struggling with drug abuse and usage. Many of the people that you categorize as homeless are also drug users. They fail their drug tests in their state that they presided (sic) in and are taken off their welfare system. And they come to New York and now it's our sole burden to take care of these people? I really don't think so.

The majority of crimes are due to drug usage. Most of the time when a home is broken into, it is a drug addict looking for items of value to pawn off and buy drugs. Remember the pharmacy in Medford? I know he was not homeless, but what he had done because he was so desperate for his drugs. And I don't think we need any more in this community.

What Suffolk County wants to do to the Hauppauge community is an outright disgrace. Concentrating all the homeless into our community and to save money for County will in the long run severely hurt our residents' safety, finances, taxes and value of their home, nonetheless the drug usage.

I appreciate your time today. And I just want to let you know that I am in favor of the resolution 1817 and I support Mr. Kennedy. I appreciate your time and please stop -- please stop continuing to add homeless people to our community.

(APPLAUSE)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Rob; and then Ernest Linder on deck.

MR. GENNARI:
Let's talk about the facts. Suffolk County law states that no more than 12 families shall be located in any one facility. Now it seems that Suffolk County Executive, Steve Bellone, is of the impression that he can choose which laws he must obey. He believes that if he illegally places 96 or more families in a building never designed to be a homeless shelter, he can subvert current laws through a process called normalization. Mr. Bellone must think that the citizens of Hauppauge and Brentwood school districts are so out of touch that we won't notice or care about the additional burden he's placed on our school districts, our fire districts and our police department. He must think that we're apathetic towards his lawlessness, too busy living our own lives to care. He must think that we're okay with the loss of services our children and communities will be forced to endure. The man and his pattern of recklessness and unlawful interpretation of mandate is troubling. After all, this is the same man who thinks it's possible to serve as a full-time Legislator and a full-time Assistant Superintendent in a School District.

Homelessness is a terrible problem that over decades many have sought to address. It is clearly a societal problem. All of society. As the problem is all of ours, the burden should be placed fairly and equally by all of us. Placing 40 to 60% of the County's homeless in one or two facilities separated by less than two miles is neither fair, equitable or legal. With 565 homeless families in Suffolk County and 71 school districts, solution's simple. Third grade math says eight families should be located in each district. Thanks to the real estate downturn there should be no shortage of availability of housing for this purpose.

Sadly, it appears this board is more concerned about County politics than they are about honorably representing their constituencies including the homeless. If this were not the case, representative Kennedy's bill would not have been tabled on multiple occasions. Your plan to wait us out by scheduling these meetings while most have to work is fatally flawed. We will not allow this plan to continue. We will not go away. We will not stop this fight until County laws are obeyed or until new Legislators make up this committee. Remember Election Day's coming. Do what you know is right. Pass senator -- Legislator Kennedy's bill to cancel CHI's contract. Then go back to the drawing

board and devise a solution which is a benefit -- or beneficial to both the homeless and the communities in which they live. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Mr. Linder and then Lisa Lalli on deck.

MR. LINDER:
Good morning.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Good morning.

MR. LINDER:
There's an old adage that when you look at the homeless problem you have to say there but for the grace of God go I. It's not that we're not compassionate people. If we see a family in need, I think every one of us would do what we can to try to help. The question is how many do we help? And who makes the decisions that we take this heavy concentration of people and dump them in our area? And I think that's really what the question is is that we are willing to help to a point. But there's such a thing as being overburdened. And I think that's really the question I have is who makes that decision? Who decides to say how many people will come into our area? I don't know who that is and I'd really appreciate it if somebody could inform us about that, what the procedure is. Because, like I said, we do have a lot of empty homes and maybe something else could be done in that direction.

But concentrating people en masse like that -- it's not fair to them, it's not fair to the community for the various reasons you've heard. Anyway it's in your lap and hopefully the right decision will be made.

I keep thinking about the situation we had with the Foley Nursing Home. There was a buyer there that wanted to buy it, there was a facility, there were jobs. It went nowhere. The place is closed, everybody was out and people that were trying to protect it, they all lost their jobs anyway. So you have to wonder who makes these decisions. So, anyway, for what it's worth -- but this is what you guys are getting paid for. I thank you.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Thank you, sir.

(APPLAUSE)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Miss Lalli and on deck Edward Sanders.

MS. LALLI:
Hi, my name is Lisa Lalli. I just have a question with the holidays approaching, has anybody in the past six months been actually placed into a home where they call to have a family and a Christmas tree? And what is CHI's track record about placing people into permanent housing? Because I don't see anybody who has left or been placed. I mean, are we going to be getting that information?

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
We could ask the Commissioner who's here. We'll call him up afterwards to address any questions.

MS. LALLI:
Okay, thank you.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Okay, thank you, Miss Lalli.

(APPLAUSE)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Mr. Sanders and on deck Janine Winiarz.

MR. SANDERS:
My name is Edward F. Sanders. I'm a resident of Hauppauge for 45 years. My adult children are third generation here.

This town has been getting trashed left and right nonstop for the last 45 years. Every single thing they can possibly pull against this School District and this town, they've done. Bottom line is it's been beaten to death here and this is -- so many meetings we've gone to. We're breaking the law here. Every person in this room is compassionate. I'll use the Knights of Columbus hall. They condemned us under eminent domain so they can widen the highway, which they didn't do. All the money we used to make charitably to support shelters like this -- there's a shelter on Jericho Turnpike in Smithtown just west of Old Willets Path, it's very overburdened. What goes on at that place is unbelievable. The break-ins in the houses, the drug problems and everything else. We are breaking the law. What I'd love to know is who out of this group made the decision to put this in not looking at what the law is of how many families can be put here? They're not doing their job. I'd like to know who that person is and fire them. Also, my tax dollars are being used for something that's illegal.

(APPLAUSE)

I don't want my tax dollars to be used for something illegal. I'm a compassionate guy. I'm a soccer coach, a Little League coach, a Boy Scout leader. I do charitable events constantly and nonstop. But enough is enough.

You know what, I'd also like to know the principals of this -- of this building that are getting all this money. It's against the law for anybody to get ahead by the commission of a felony. Well, what's going on here is a felony with the amount of hands that are -- the money that's changing hands here, I'd like to know who's getting money to their political campaigns from this facility? Because something's going on here because the entire community is against this and it's still going through.

(APPLAUSE)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Thank you, sir. Miss Winiarz and on deck Deleia -- DeLeia Lee? DeLeia -- I'm sorry -- Lee. Miss Lee. Delcia. Oh, that's a C not E. I'm sorry.

MS. WINIARZ:
Okay. Good morning. It's recently come to my attention that there has also been opposition to facilities of similar size and nature in Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn and Glendale, Queens. The reason I believe that all this opposition is coming up is because a facility of this size is not good for any community and I don't think anybody would choose to have it.

Commissioner O'Neill usually gets up and speaks and answers questions at the end of the public

portion. And unfortunately we are not given the opportunity to address him. I am one of the people that have come to all of these meetings including the original question-and-answer meeting where I was told that somebody would get back to me in regards to my questions and I would be given the answers. I have not received any.

So I pose these questions to you in hopes that you will then ask them to him after this meeting: What is the site selection process? Why is there an aggregate need to house 800 people in less than two miles? These people are clearly not coming from the Hauppauge community. And -- so if you could ask him that so we can get an answer to that because none of that has ever been addressed.

Legislator Krupski, on your Legislative page you say government must serve all the people. And this is what I will bring to the table when facing challenges on the County level where problems can be resolved through hard work and cooperation. That is what we're asking of you today. The homeless community has a lot of advocates and a lot of people standing up and speaking for them and making sure their rights are protected and we are counting on you and the Legislative board to make sure our rights are protected as a community.

Legislator Browning, you talk -- you spoke about your concern for the size of this facility and we're all aware that you do have a facility of a similar size in your neighborhood, I'm sorry, in your Legislative district. But you haven't spoken as to how you or your constituents would feel if another one was opened less than two miles away from the one that's currently in existence. And I truly think that both you and your community would have a big issue with that.

(APPLAUSE)

And then my last question is, and this is more for Dennis Brown, while I understand that State law preempts County law, what State law would be broken by transitioning back to the smaller facilities? Because I haven't been able to find anything that if we switched back to the smaller facilities would be not in accordance with State law. So maybe he could explain that or maybe somebody here has the answer to that, but I would appreciate that information as well. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Miss Lee and on deck Jennifer Reidel.

MS. LEE:
I had so much to say and I realize I only had three minutes to speak, but I will ditto every single one of my contingency (sic) on what they say and I applaud what they said. My question -- my number one question is, where is Mr. Bellone today? He's in West Babylon. Why isn't he supporting the homeless in his hometown?

My other question is: What is this all about? Is it politics? Or is it who's making the big bucks up there? I found out about all of this and I decided I was going to do research and I spent hours and hours of research. I have two children in the Hauppauge school. I am very proud of my district. We've worked numerous hours not just to get government money, but we've done our own, our own, taking time out of our busy schedules, people who work to do charities, to support our School District, to keep our communities clean. I don't see why Mr. Bellone, who's not here today to show his face to us -- to us could condemn what we've worked so hard for.

(APPLAUSE)

In my research I had found out and I would like, because I only had the three minutes, I will cut it short, but I want to know why, why am I finding out information like this? This is the City, New York

City, overcrowded with homeless people. This is what we want Hauppauge to look like? This is what we want Hauppauge to look like.

(APPLAUSE)

Okay? And what is the title of this? Why run a slum if you could make more money on housing the homeless? Is this where we are at?

(APPLAUSE)

I need answers. My community needs answers. Why is this going around on internets? Today is the community. We all have laptops, we all have computers. We need answers. We need answers.

Here's another one, another article. A homeless family in Massachusetts who sold their daughter, sold their daughter, simply because they wanted their drugs instead, instead of helping their family out. This is what we're looking for here in Hauppauge? We're going to have the drug addicts of their families so that they can buy their drugs? I'm not against homeless people. I am for my community's homeless people. People through no fault of their own because of Sandy, because of prices, have gone to the bottom. Those are the people that need to be helped. I have a mom who suffers from dementia. I have a dad who suffers from Alzheimer and mesothelioma. They worked their entire life here in this community. And you know what? Section 8 is closing. They cannot get the help. I am a disabled person.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Miss Lee, wrap up.

MS. LEE:
And I am the one, I am the one supporting them.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Miss Reidel and then on deck Karen Baumann.

MS. REIDY:
Reidy, it's Jennifer Reidy. That's okay.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
I'm sorry.

MS. REIDY:
You guys unfortunately know who I am. Been here many times beating a dead horse. My biggest thing is awareness and I am one of the people who are trying to communicate what is going on in the community because it's unfair that we were kind of blind sided. We didn't know this was going on until it landed in our laps and issues started arising in our schools.
We have hundreds of supporters now who can't attend but are grateful for our voices and efforts. Whether or not you're reading the e-mails or seeing any of the letters that the residents are saying, I think it's important that we stress some of the most important things that have been sent to us. One of them said: *I attended the first meeting regarding this issue. It happened to be at night, though; but perhaps you may think that the problem will be forgotten in the minds of your*

constituents if you wait and drag it out. Well, it won't. I can't understand why it's taken even a third meeting. The taxpayers of Suffolk County can't afford to lose work in order to show collective support for Legislator Kennedy's interim resolution while you do nothing. I am in full support of this.

So this is what most of the people are saying. And I do think that maybe the next meeting you can consider posting it at an evening hour where people can attend.

(APPLAUSE)

MS. REIDY:
Another very important -- another important question that I have is we have not had the answer as to how many of these homeless people are from out of state. That is the number one concern. That is the number one thing that should be addressed and we need an answer for that. And that's my personal thing.

But here's a letter. *I want to stress that I am in no way against having homeless individuals living in my neighborhood. And, in fact, believe strongly that every community must do their part to help those who are less fortunate.* This is not me obviously because I'm not a psychologist. This person is a psychologist in private practice in Hauppauge. They routinely see homeless children who are referred to them by the Hauppauge district and it is free of charge. *I have an intimate knowledge of the struggles that these children and their families face and have demonstrated my sincere desire to help. Based upon my experience and knowledge, I am steadfast against the concept of mega-shelters. I do not believe that they are in the best interests of the homeless families, who, I believe, can be better provided for by the community if they're in smaller shelters distributed within all of our communities.*

I also have grave concerns about the safety of a shelter that houses so many families that are struggling. Most homeless families that I've encountered have consisted of good people who need assistance to get back on their feet. However, there's also a significant number of individuals who are homeless and have serious mental health issues and/or drug or alcohol addictions. You guys stated -- somebody stated in one of the previous meetings, too, that they don't really screen them unless there's, you know, some sort of indication. Are they regularly checked if there is some sort of indication? To ignore this concern is simply not accepting the facts. If you place 100 families together, you are exposing homeless children to additional risks that they do not need in their life at this time.

The School District resources will also undoubtedly be overburdened. Common sense dictates that this is an unfortunate consequence of having so many families in need local -- located in a small area. There is also impact upon a neighborhood that cannot be ignored.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Ms. Reidy?

MS. REIDY:
If communities' resources get overwhelmed and school scores decrease, property values decline and those with financial means move out and seek areas that are not overwhelmed and school districts --

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Ms. Reidy, your time is expired. Please wrap up.

MS. REIDY:
Okay. *We have seen this throughout Long Island. Is this why areas like Brentwood, Wyandanch, Copiague and Hempstead struggle to improve their schools year after year with little success? These*

communities need to keep the educated and financially stable living in their neighborhood. This will not happen if an area is flooded with hundreds of low-income families.

Please do not read this as a "not-in-my-backyard" philosophy as I feel those who know me can attest that this is not about --

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Ms. Reidy? Ms. Reidy, your time is expired.

MS. REIDY:
Okay.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Thank you.

MS. REIDY:
I think you got the point.

(APPLAUSE)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
You can -- you can submit your remarks if you will like for the record. Miss Baumann.

MS. BAUMANN:
Hi, I also --

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Excuse me, Miss Baumann, before you begin. If there's anyone that didn't get an opportunity to finish their remarks, you can submit your remarks for the official record to the Clerk that's in front of you so that will be made part of the official record. Okay, proceed. Thank you.

MS. BAUMANN:
I also asked a lot of questions at the original meeting and I have yet to get an answer. But still the main question is why is Suffolk County allowed to break the law? The excuse that local restrictions is superceded by State Emergency Housing Law is an ill attempt for Suffolk County to break their own law. Many families are struggling on Long Island and have their own state of emergency; paying their mortgage and other expenses. But are we allowed to make up a new law or bend the law because that's how we can reduce our costs we incur from day-to-day?

If the Suffolk County's office can bend the rules, shouldn't we, the constituents, have the same opportunity? Any one of us could find ourself homeless, but would you want to live beside 96 other families with no kitchen access? It does not make sense to put so many struggling families in one location. It does nothing for the emotional wellbeing of anybody, especially the children, the homeless children and the children in our community.

If these homeless families do have jobs, how far is their commute now in the mega-shelter? It makes sense to have the legal 12 families in smaller groups possibly closer to their employment, their friends, their family members and their support personnel. Has Suffolk County really thought about what they're doing? It appears that Suffolk County does not care about the homeless, but only their own agenda and their bottom line.

I resent that Hauppauge's being portrayed as prejudiced about the homeless shelter. It has to do with the law. The law is not being followed. I shudder to think what Suffolk County has in store for

our community in the future. This needs to stop now and our laws need to be followed by those who were elected to represent us. Unfortunately, it appears that these elected officials --

(APPLAUSE)

-- it appears that these elected officials have now created their own agenda. Hauppauge is a friendly, welcoming community. However, even Hauppauge has its financial limits. Housing 96 families in an illegal, let me say that again, illegal, mega-shelter --

(APPLAUSE)

-- goes beyond what any community is capable of doing. It has nothing to do with the "not-in-my-backyard" as one Legislator stated. She is mistaken. It has to do with the shelter being illegal. Suffolk County is not conforming with Section 438 of the Administrative Code. The right thing to do is to terminate the contract for the mega-shelter and adhere to the law. It should not be taking this law this long to do what is legally right and morally right. It should not matter what political party you belong to. These are people's lives that you're playing with; people's lives in the shelter and people's lives in the community. These are peoples' lives that you are playing with. Legislator Kennedy's Resolution 1817 needs to be passed and it needs to be passed today. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
That is all the cards that I have. If there's someone else that would like to come forward, please do so now. Okay. All right. We will close out the Public Portion. We do have the Commissioner here. There were several questions. Try not to be repetitive. I know that you answered most of the questions but those that may have not been addressed prior, maybe we can seek an answer. I guess the primary one that comes to mind is the site selection.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Sure.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
The process.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Good morning, the Human Services Committee.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Good morning.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Site selection was done via County policy, which is an RFQ. I believe it was out in 2011. The sites reviewed in 2012. Contracts were executed in 2013. January of 2013 for one location and April of 2013 for another location. So that's how it was done in compliance with County policy.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Right, well, what precipitated, I guess, was the County -- and went through, I guess, the process of internally, I'm thinking, well, the Department of Social Services actually, not the County -- well, you are part of the County, you're not exclusive -- said well, maybe we should look at housing our homeless in a different way. So there was a request for quotes or a proposal that was sent out.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Correct.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
And you got responses.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
So, I mean, going back -- back to the presentation I gave probably -- roughly a month ago, in there it laid out numerous timeframes of chronology of thinking from as far back as 2004, 2005 that Tier II may be something that needed to be explored. So it wasn't something that just happened in the last year. Again, then in 2011 RFQ was issued. Went through a public procurement. It was advertised probably in Newsday and other local papers as per County policy and then, again, as I laid out earlier the contract time -- timeframe.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
I had a question, it just escaped me. I'll try to remember it. But CHI, they're not just, you know, somebody just walked off the street, they -- have a record.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
They have smaller sites as well. They're a vendor we've utilized as well as -- elsewhere around New York State they're utilized. Nassau County, I believe, uses them. I believe, Westchester as well. Very reputable vendor.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Okay. Yeah, I remember my question now. As far as the Tier II process the certification of being a Tier II, one is to have on-site ability to -- cooking facilities; right?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
That's correct. That's one piece, yes, that's correct.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
So although there may not be cooking facilities on location now, that's a temporary situation.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
That is correct.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Okay.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
As part of the Tier II certification process the vendor submits an application to New York State, DSS reviews it and then it goes to New York State. As part of that review, there is a -- a plan to have cooking facilities on-site. New York State OTDA is aware of that situation. It's supposed to be temporary, yes.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Okay. And the other question that comes to mind is the -- do you have any record of how many people were moved to permanent housing?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Yes. So last time we were here Legislator Kennedy asked for -- for that statistic. Twenty-five families through 2013. So from February of this year, the facility opened in January, through December, and this dated as of last Thursday, is 25 families have found permanency.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Okay.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
There's four more with applications in process. That doesn't mean they will get permanency, but there are four more as well in process. So 25 total.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
And as I understand it, as of late last week I would say approximately 50% of the students that reside in the shelter -- there's a reduction of 50% of the students in the School District that come from the shelter. Maybe a little bit more.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
So let me just run through that. There are currently ten students residing that are in a DSS shelter that attend the Hauppauge School District. Nine are from the aforementioned shelter.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS:
You're lying, you're lying.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
No comments from the audience please.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
As of November 25th -- as of November 25th there were ten students.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:
Why can't we ask questions?

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Look, look, look. Let me run the meeting. You had the opportunity to speak. We gave you the opportunity to speak. You asked questions, we're asking those questions. So please respect the process.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Legislator, they also asked about the out-of-state children. There are currently a total of 13 children from out-of-state and four of those were Suffolk residents in the last few years. They moved out of state to try to find a better life, if you will, and then came back.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
With this new policy, has our motel population, where we put homeless, has that decreased, increased, remain the same?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Yes, it's decreased about 50%.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Okay. And, I guess, I think it's important to state on the record why that's important to get people away from motels.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Sure. So when homeless families are placed in motels, they don't receive any services at all. What

do I mean by that? They don't receive any sort of casework in terms of evaluating the family for helping with, let's say, their resume, job prospects or referrals, working with the Department of Labor, we work with extensively.

Also, in terms of support for their family, maybe the Mom and Dad needs a GED or some other formal education. Again, SWEP is Work Experience Program through DOL, evaluating for substance abuse and mental health, that happens, as part of the intake process. That was brought up earlier so I'll address it during this response here in this question. We do have caseworkers that go back in when they're at motels, that makes it harder for our caseworkers to do that type of referral. That's why having them in a shelter that's more centralized, we can observe them daily and then get them referred. The Department does make referrals for mental health, substance abuse, alcohol abuse, daily. If anyone that comes into our center whether it's -- whether they're homeless or not, if we believe that there is an issue we refer them. It's not mandatory but we do do it everyday.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Okay. I'll let some of my colleagues they're -- they're chomping at the bit. Legislator Krupski wants to have questions.

LEG. KRUPSKI:
Thank you. I think a lot of questions that you asked Commissioner O'Neill answered. As far as the population of the shelters and how has it changed over the year, is that -- is that, now you just mentioned that the -- the change in the population of homeless children attending the local School District. What about the population in general at the shelter, has it changed since January?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Since January, well, obviously we opened in January. So it went up through the first few months.

LEG. KRUPSKI:
Right.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
And it's been pretty stable the last three months.

LEG. KRUPSKI:
Okay, thank you. And then another comment, I wrote down comments as people spoke, a fair distribution of the homeless children, you know, I've seen the list of Suffolk County. And to suggest that Hauppauge is getting an inordinate share of homeless children, it just is not true. If you look at communities on the East End, we've got a much higher distribution of homeless children than Hauppauge so that's -- that's just not true at all.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
So if you just speak to that point, Legislator, there are currently 660 homeless school-aged children. There's ten in Hauppauge. That works out to one and-a-half percent.

LEG. KRUPSKI:
Thank you. And then the delivery of services. I think you, I think you addressed that. The importance of if they are in a shelter then what are the services do they get, how do they get -- I mean, is it -- if you're in a shelter, do you have to get those services or are they optional or are they both?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Sure. In a Tier II-like structure they are mandated. They have to get them. In a lower, smaller or a congregate shelter, as referred to, what is mandated is less. It's just basically casework-type

services. But there are much more services that are mandated with a Tier II. And that's why the Department, when they embarked on this journey of Tier II, asked in cooperation with the vendors to get certified, this way it's mandated. It's not optional. So that we are providing the best level of services for homeless individuals to help them attain permanency so that their assistance is temporary.

LEG. KRUPSKI:
Thank you. Another question was a woman asked for the possibility of the evening meetings. I don't know if that's a possibility or not. It certainly serves the community better to have an evening meeting. I don't know if that works out logistically for our --

(APPLAUSE)

And then, you could answer that later, I got a couple more things. Oh, you did answer track record for placement. And -- and I did take great offense, once a man suggested that we're all on the take here because these shelters are located in your backyard. And I find that very offensive. We're all trying to do our job here. And especially in this time of year when, you know, to quote Charles Dickens from the Christmas Carol, you know, *are there no jails or are there no almshouses,* to suggest that we're just trying to push this -- this social problem off on one community is very unfair.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS:
(Inaudible)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
All right, all right. Enough, enough. Please. Enough. I'm going to ask you to leave. If you can't contain yourself, I'm going to ask you to leave. Legislator, are you -- are you finished?

LEG. KRUPSKI:
Thank you.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Okay. Thank you, Mr. Krupski. Legislator Kennedy.

LEG. KENNEDY:
Legislator Barraga, if he's got a question, I want to yield to the Committee because I'm not a member of the Committee. I have quite a bit to say, obviously, but I want to yield to the Committee members if they -- if they anything else to -- to raise.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
There's a few. Legislator Browning and then I have Legislator Barraga. Kate, you're up.

LEG. BROWNING:
Okay, John. Okay, John, one of the earlier speakers made mention of there's a requirement of so many students per 1,000 in the School District. Could you answer to that because I'm trying to figure out where that came from.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
There's -- there is not a thousand students in any School District. I'm not trying to --

LEG. BROWNING:
No, no, no. I think what she's referring to is that there's a requirement that they're -- when it comes to putting the homeless children in a School District, you're only allowed to have so many per 1,000

students. So, excuse me, Hauppauge is about 4900 students, so what, I'm not sure -- get that number from.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
I don't know if there's any restriction. I've never seen one in Social Services regulation. I will follow up though and ask and see if that is the case.

LEG. BROWNING:
Okay.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
But I don't recollect any hard number like that at all; any reference like that.

LEG. BROWNING:
Okay. And there was reference, I mean, I received quite a few e-mails -- I have to say, some of the e-mails were pretty disturbing, the comments that were made in the e-mails with regards to the homeless families and some very derogatory comments, which I thought was just horrendous. But, you know, I understand the -- the concern of too many children in your School District.

Like I said, I think it was Mrs. Winiarz, I hope I said your name right, you know, wanted to know how many shelters there are in my district, I'm very familiar with the shelters that are in my district and I know within five square miles I know of two. One is a home for families of domestic violence. And there is another homeless shelter, all within probably about three square miles that I'm very familiar with and very supported by the community when it comes to donations over Christmas. And I also have a veterans homeless shelter in Yaphank. So I -- I know the homeless shelters in my district and so, you know, to think that I don't have anything other than the Tier II, I absolutely do.

The other thing is there was some comments and I don't disagree with the residents with families who are walking out at night on the street with children in strollers. Can CHI require, and I believe they could, a curfew?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
They do have a curfew, yes. However, any type of safety issue like that we will look into regardless of the time.

LEG. BROWNING:
Right.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
That people may be walking on Motor Parkway. I've already had this conversation with Legislator Kennedy, brought it to my attention, and I will look at the Suffolk bus routes to see if we can change that to accommodate. If not, I will ask the vendor to put in some kind of transportation, find out where the residents are walking to and see if we can put some kind of -- a route together --

LEG. BROWNING:
Yeah.
COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
-- that they could schedule so they won't be in an unsafe area.

LEG. BROWNING:
Right, and again, they really shouldn't be walking out at night with their children in the dark. So I would like to know what the -- what their curfew is and I -- I do plan to go to the facility. I would like to go visit and see what's going on. And I did hear comments, there was some comments from,

I don't know if it was at a meeting or one of my e-mails, with regards to drug activity in the parking lot. I know, I believe John has spoken with the -- the precinct to have that monitored. But I did learn that there's a, I don't know what you would want to call it, I guess a gentlemen's club nearby. I use that term loosely.

But anyway, you know, again are we sure that that kind of activity isn't coming from that location or from the homeless shelter. So I definitely would request that we make sure that there's an -- an intense police presence focusing on that parking lot and what's going on.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
We will reiterate --

AUDIENCE MEMBER:
(Inaudible)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Look, look. No, no. I'm not going to allow this. All right? This is the third time I've said it. You had your opportunity to speak. We asked the Commissioner to come forward. He's responding to questions from the Legislators. This is the process. If you don't like it, you're welcome to leave, but you're not going to interrupt the process. Thank you. Have a nice day.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:
(Inaudible)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
All right.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:
(Inaudible)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
What did you say? Oh, okay. I thought you said something. We're going to proceed now.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:
(Inaudible)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
No. Ma'am, ma'am, there's a Legislator who has the floor who's asking the questions of the Commissioner -- asking your questions.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:
Are they paying attention? They're talking amongst each other. Are they paying attention?

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Well --

AUDIENCE MEMBER:
They're talking amongst each other. Are they paying attention?

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Ma'am, have a nice day. Thank you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

They don't care what's going on.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Have a nice day. Thank you. I'm sorry, sir. No, no.

(APPLAUSE)

AUDIENCE MEMBER:
-- take time out. Okay?

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Sir.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:
Why can't you take time out?

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Sir.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:
Why can't the Commissioner sit at the dais where everybody's asking their questions?

AUDIENCE MEMBERS:
Right, right.

(APPLAUSE)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
We're going to proceed with the way we've been proceeding. Legislator Krupski -- Legislator Krupski -- I'm sorry, Legislator Browning has the floor.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
I'll answer. We will reiterate the request to the police department to monitor the activity around the area. You know, we point out all these different locations around the shelter. The Girl Scouts are also located, I believe, right down the road.

LEG. BROWNING:
And if you, I don't remember, I don't know if -- I assume the lady is still here that made reference to the -- the law or the rule as far as so many children per -- per 1,000. If she could give me that information or your Legislator, Mr. Kennedy, the -- where she got that information because I'd be interested in following up on that.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
And let me just state for the record, if anybody has a question for the Department of Social Services, the easiest way to contact is to go online, go to Suffolk County homepage. My information is on the homepage. You could call my office, the Commissioner Response Unit, or you can mail in and we'd be happy to answer all the questions if you have a specific question for the Department of Social Services.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Okay, Legislator Barraga.

LEG. BARRAGA:
Commissioner, let me ask you a couple of questions. Have you had any contact with the State Assemblyperson or the State Senator who represents the Hauppauge area? And the reason I'm asking that is that you have made reference to I think the Temporary and Disability Assistance Office of the State of New York and their position that there was a letter written indicating that the State law supersedes the local Suffolk County law. It would seem to me that the Assemblyperson for the Hauppauge area and the State Senator should take an active role in seeking out this agency in terms of representing the Hauppauge people. Have you spoken to the State Assemblyperson or Senator or have either one of those two individuals approached you concerning this letter?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
No, neither have approached me and I have not approached them either.

LEG. BARRAGA:
All right. Do you have any intentions or is it basically you've accepted this letter from this office and you will abide by it. You don't have any concerns about it or what?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
I will say -- let me answer that two ways: The first way is that the legal question should be handled by the County Attorney's Office and they have weighed in.

LEG. BARRAGA:
All right. So the answer is no. You don't have the intentions of reaching out to the Assemblyperson or Senator.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
I didn't say that. And I will continue with the response, please, Legislator, I respectfully ask that I be allowed to continue.

Also, as it relates to that, there's been specific case law as part of that legal response. It wasn't just one time. It was multiple times.

LEG. BARRAGA:
Okay. The other thing too --

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
So, if I could just finish. I've had conversations with Legislator Kennedy as well about seeking assistance from State officials as well. So, I did not specifically reach out, no I did not, as I stated, but there have been discussions about that.

LEG. BARRAGA:
Okay. So for the people in the room too, that may be an avenue that you'd also want to reach out to. Whoever your State Assemblyperson is, your State Senator; don't assume anything, that these people are -- they're probably aware of it to some degree and maybe they really don't want to get involved in it, but, you know, you're talking about a State office here, a State agency. And they're the ones that would have direct contact, have some influence with State agencies, especially if they sit in the majority of each house, whether they be in the Assembly or the Senate.

Let me go on and ask, on October 28th you gave a distribution of the number of homeless children in various school districts. At that time, according to my figure, there was 21 homeless children in the Hauppauge School District. Today you're indicating ten. So that's a 50% reduction in one month?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Yes.

LEG. BARRAGA:
Do we have any idea --

AUDIENCE MEMBERS:
(Inaudible)

LEG. BARRAGA:
It seems -- it does seem rather extraordinary. Do you have any idea as to some of the reasons why this reduction took place? What happened to these kids?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Some found permanency. I didn't look at each specific case record, but some found permanency. And I'm sure some moved out because they didn't like the rules. That happens frequently.

LEG. BARRAGA:
All right. I guess the question too, which has to be answered, one of the reasons -- the real rationale, from what I understand, they go to these larger shelters is, is the cost factor associated with it. When you -- when you're operating a smaller shelter it runs like $103 a person. When you go to these larger mega-shelters, it's about $43 a person. This is strictly a -- basically a fiscal consideration on the part of the --

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
No, it's not. As I stated many times on the record and during presentation a month ago, it's twofold. They are -- we provide better, more enhanced services with the idea being that we get folks off temporary assistance to permanency quicker; and, yes, it is cheaper. It is twofold.

LEG. BARRAGA:
Okay. What I want to pursue is something that, I guess we have discussed this publicly and privately, we can debate the number of students in the Hauppauge School District. We can also debate the number of students maybe coming from another County or another state. But it's just the idea of a huge number of people coming into an area, you know, 84 families, 90 families, that's a lot of people. And you and I have talked about the feasibility of whittling that down to get it down to a more reasonable figure if you want to talk maybe 35 or 40 families as reasonable. But 85, 90 families at a given location; that's a lot for a given hamlet to absorb at one time.

(APPLAUSE)

LEG. BARRAGA:
I mean, is there any -- please stop. Is there any possibility as, I think in previous testimony you indicated that normally it takes, you know, six or seven months to place a family. What about the feasibility of after you place families, you just don't put them back into that facility? So if you have, you know, if you place say ten families in a year, you go from 84 to 74. You keep on whittling it down until you get to what is more of a reasonable figure. Eighty-four families, 90 families, it seems way out of whack for a given hamlet to absorb at one time.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
So, let me say that, as I -- again, as I stated on the record and at my previous presentation, that we are looking to open up more shelters primarily in eastern Suffolk. Again, I will state for the record again, the County Executive and I have said if this becomes a burden to a community, we will revisit the policy.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS:
(Inaudible)

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Ten homeless -- again.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Shhh.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
The data does not support the assertion, and we've had -- all had this conversation, we're all in agreement, I thought, that the data does not support the assertion about overburdening in the School District.

LEG. BARRAGA:
Well, certainly --

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
So the answer to your question is, yes, again, as I've said many times, I will look to reduce the number of families at these shelters at the appropriate time. Right now is not an appropriate time for me. As I stated, I need to open more smaller family shelters, as has been suggested by the Legislators, the audience, and my staff as well.

LEG. BARRAGA:
Is that the game plan to open additional smaller shelters?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
That was always the game plan, yes.

LEG. BARRAGA:
Okay.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
I've been very upfront about that.

LEG. BARRAGA:
So, what you're saying it's easier to open up a smaller shelter because we've had those for many, many years than another -- additional mega ones.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Correct.

LEG. BARRAGA:
Okay.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
I have no intention of opening another mega-shelter as folks claim.

LEG. BARRAGA:
If in the next several months you would open up two or three smaller shelters, would you be willing to reduce the number of people in Hauppauge and shift them over to the smaller shelters?

(APPLAUSE)

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Legislator, as we discussed, the wintertime is the time when demand for homelessness goes up. So I'm not going to commit to shifting families out of some place that I may need to place homeless families. However, yes, that has been the plan. We've had this discussion, as you mentioned earlier, again, I just can't come in and start promising I'm going to do something without having done the analytics to make sure it works.

LEG. BARRAGA:
All right. Because I think when you take a look at these numbers and you do the calculations it all depends on, you know, what your position is on this issue. What -- what I think is a given is that, you know, these people are absorbing 85 families. And it just seems out of whack. It seems a lot for a hamlet to absorb. And I think any intention of yours in the future to whittle that figure down to something that's more reasonable would be quite acceptable to the community.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Again, I think I've said clearly, that I am looking to do that.

LEG. BARRAGA:
Okay. All right. Thank you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:
Do it now.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:
Is there a law?

LEG. KENNEDY:
All right, Mr. Chair, if I can.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Yes.

LEG. KENNEDY:
I appreciate the Committee's time and I appreciate them listening to the concerns from the community. I think everybody has spoken by and large about what's the ongoing, recurring concern here. And the very first thing that I think I'll bring to you, Mr. Chair, as the Chair of Human Services is, and I've said this before, not a single one of us had the opportunity to go ahead and to vet and to either embrace and support or to reject what's a change in policy on a part of the Administration. The Commissioner laid out what was a decision -- clearly predates him being Commissioner, but, nevertheless it was the decision made at an Executive level and even today still continues to be something that was adopted only by the Administration.

Now we've had multiple opportunities to talk about my resolution. It's been the Committee's choice to go ahead and to table that. That's the will of the Committee. But I think the underlying element, and make no mistake about it, we'll be back here doing this again in January, is to get at the root element associated with the policy to move to these larger shelters.

We had the opportunity to go ahead and be briefed in Executive Session. And I appreciate the fact that the Commissioner took the time to do that. It's vitally clear to all of us, there are many, many, many shelters throughout Suffolk County, but only three of them that go to this size and really nothing that eclipses this facility in the center of Hauppauge. So right there we go to what is clearly an equity issue.

And to the Commissioner, I think the thing that, and Legislator Barraga pointed this out, it is -- it is too much to ask any one community to have to absorb the possibility. It's as if it is, and I don't mean this as a reference to the homeless individuals, but to the potential, it is -- it's as if it is a Sword of Damocles because -- and here's where the Commissioner and I have a little bit of disagreement and I will now contact State Ed and have them bring somebody down to brief us on McKinney-Vento, because the Federal law is very clear that once someone is deemed homeless, they have an absolute right to choose where it is they elect to enroll their children. By definition, and without breaching any kind of confidentiality, we know there are many more than ten children, school age children, that reside in that facility.

(APPLAUSE)

So it is as if all these residents continue to have to wonder and await what will happen if residents elect to exercise their Federal right. That's the equity issue. That's the reason that we did not embrace this. That's the reason that we supported multiple shelters in excess of 30 throughout the balance of the County. And this unilateral shift is a shift we never embraced. It's wrong. It's not the right way to go. And quite frankly you're seeing overwhelmingly that the community is coming forward saying *we don't want to go in this route*. You yourself, Mr. Chair, sponsored that bill to say children should be educated in the district that they last had permanency from. So even there we all have this sense that we're better off able to go ahead and restore individuals to stability by trying to keep them anchored in the community.

And as far as the ability to get services, Mr. Commissioner, look, we have social workers, we have labor department personnel, there's nothing that says that we can't go ahead and support them. And the motel rationale, quite frankly, is, is that is, in essence, a motel.

(APPLAUSE)

So how can we go ahead and say, we want to take them out of a motel, when we put them back in a motel? Ultimately the issue associated with the cooking issue runs to a town-based issue. That is a special exception use. That never was authorized for cooking or the other types of long-term permanency. So we are yet again smack against something that is at the town level where zoning control clearly is unauthorized. I don't care how many times you come back and talk about it, the underlying issues are going to be same issues here, Mr. Chair.

So, towards Legislator Barraga's discussion as far as running down the census, absolutely I'm in favor of it. But most of all I'm in favor of adhering to the law notwithstanding what the County Attorney said. I'd ask the Committee to consider the bill again.

(APPLAUSE)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
And just to -- and just to address your comments, just briefly, I don't want to -- the -- our experience is different than -- I understand what the perception can be but the reality is different. You know, the fear of, you know, you have 100 plus families in the home, and yes, there is maybe ten now, 20, whatever the number is, but that could be exponentially much more than that. But with our experience with Help Suffolk, that's not the case. And it's been there, what, 20 years? Ten years?

You know, the kids -- you know, these kids, these are homeless children, and they're homeless families. You know, they have roots and things and families, they have preferences as well. You know, they don't want to go to a School District where, send their ten year-old to a class where they don't have any friends, you know, particularly in this climate of, this anxiety and frustration from the

community. They want to go to -- being homeless, there's not much familiar to you, but your School District is. So they have their own preferences as well. And -- and for the most part, I would imagine that 90% of them probably would want to go to their School District. Those out of state, they have no preference, yeah, that's -- that's going to be an issue. But -- and that's where my understanding really lies and these families and the concerns of the School District because the education, the law doesn't allow for them to -- to be -- for funding for that.

And that to me is unfair. It is. It really is. If you set your budget, and you're expecting, say, 600 kids and you have 610 or whatever the case may be, you're not -- you're not -- you didn't allocate or prepare for those ten extra kids which may be -- it's going to be a cost. And somewhere there should be a lobbying effort with the State to correct that. But the bottom line is these kids are homeless. We need to educate them. Because if we're not going to educate them, we're going to put in our jails, we're going to pay $200 a day, you know, $40,000 a year to house them in --

LEG. KENNEDY:
Nobody's taking issue with education, Mr. Chair. As a matter of fact not a single person has come up here who has said they don't believe the children should be able to get the opportunity to --

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
No, but what I did hear is -- and -- I'm not even going to go there. You know, there's a lot of things that have been said that are -- you know, some are credible, some are not. And, you know, the bottom line is we have a moral obligation to house our homeless families. This community is not being overburdened. We looked at the statistics --

(AUDIENCE OUTBURSTS)

You know, my community --

LEG. KENNEDY:
Hold on, hold on, hold on.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
I have six times the amount of homeless children in my community than your district. We saw the numbers.

(AUDIENCE OUTBURSTS)

I have -- look, I have the floor. I have a men's shelter 400 feet from my district office. I have a family shelter approximately a quarter mile from my office. I have a project going up now for 74 homeless veterans families about a mile-and-a-half from my office. So, you know, our communities are -- as Legislator Krupski has mentioned, we're all absorbing this. This new concept, yes, it may be -- yeah, it's of concern. And it's of concern for me as well. I don't know if it's going to work. You know, we have Help Suffolk. That's the only example that we have. But to make the statement that homelessness is being pushed onto one community is not the case; it's not the case at all. We need to raise our children.

LEG. KENNEDY:
But the only thing I would come back to, Mr. Chair, and it does little for the dialogue of the discussion, and I will bring it to you, the numbers don't lie. We all got to see where we have the three largest shelter concentrations of individuals being put into facilities.

(APPLAUSE)

So there's no dispute with that. No amount of me explaining to the balance of the Committee -- I mean each and every one of you saw it, each and every one of you knows that we have the responsibility to go ahead and ultimately as a county address the issues with homelessness and we have to go ahead and address the issues of education for the children; but quite frankly we have an obligation to go ahead and provide a humane methodology for homeless folks to go ahead and have a safe place to be and to get reintegrated.

Putting people in motel rooms and compelling women to have to push kids in baby strollers and have young toddlers wandering like nomads up and down Motor Parkway is not humane.

(APPLAUSE)

And as a matter of fact, the electronic benefits that we're giving to those folks, they're spending in 7/Eleven, you know, it's simple -- simple mathematics. You know, to spend two dollars for a box full of Cheerios in a grocery store makes more sense than have to pay for 2.50 for a small single self-serving. That's what we're facilitating. We did that. We can't run from it. We gotta own it. And that's just nonsense about how this is more compassionate and better. It's not. And we're not looking at what the spin out effects are of this decision here.

(APPLAUSE)

So, look I don't want to take up the Committee's time anymore. We've been at it for a while. You've heard what's going on here. I may ask you, Mr. Chair, if you're Chair of Human Services next year, maybe I'll ask you to contemplate and consider, you know, an alternate meeting, a PM meeting. I think Legislator Krupski had a good idea. You were kind enough to join us while we had the public information meeting in October. You can see, this is probably just a smattering of a number of folks that have real concerns here. And I think at the very least they do deserve to be heard. They're going to be heard with decorum, that's kind of the way it goes, folks, but nonetheless they have a right to be heard. So we're going to have to come back to it.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Okay. Legislator Krupski and then Browning quickly, please.

(APPLAUSE)

LEG. KRUPSKI:
Sure. And I don't mind, you know, spending the time on this. This is important to a lot of people.

LEG. KENNEDY:
Good.

LEG. KRUPSKI:
Not only -- it's the people who are in the shelter and certainly the people in the community. So the time is not a factor.

And I've got a question -- some questions for the Commissioner based on what Legislator Kennedy said. Is there -- the Tier II shelters, is there a limit to their size as far as --

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Yes.

LEG. KRUPSKI:
What is it?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
It depends on the actual square footage of the building.

(AUDIENCE OUTBURSTS)

LEG. KRUPSKI:
No, no, no, I didn't ask the question right.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Oh, you mean the actual physical location size?

LEG. KRUPSKI:
No. No, no. How many families could be -- and, please, folks, be respectful. We really are trying to work through this. We know it's a big concern, but please be respectful.

No, the size, how many families -- is there a limit to how many families? And over that limit constitutes a Tier II -- or qualifying for a Tier II shelter?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Yes. Ten or more is Tier II.

LEG. KRUPSKI:
All right.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
But you have to apply for it. Just because you have a facility that has 14 families doesn't make it a Tier II.

LEG. KRUPSKI:
Understood. So could you provide the same -- if you had smaller units, like Legislator Kennedy suggested, could you provide those people with the same services in order to get them jobs or to get them into permanent housing?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
In some situations, yes. If it's a two-family house, let's say, no, we're not going to put a caseworker there, but we'll have a caseworker go visit. So, again --

LEG. KRUPSKI:
Okay.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
-- what's been suggested about the motels, same thing again, we're putting somebody in a motel with no supervision, all right, no caseworker, all right. That -- that is not a good situation. That's what the County had been doing. It was expensive and we're not providing services on a timely basis because of the geographical layout of going to all these different motels. It's not practical.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:
(Inaudible)

LEG. KRUPSKI:
Legislator Gregory's -- Legislator Gregory's earlier legislation about trying to ensure that these homeless children are placed in their -- or go to school in their own, what they would consider home districts --

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
So --

LEG. KRUPSKI:
Where did -- I'm sorry. How many -- so how many children from this shelter are being bussed elsewhere?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
128.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:
And we're paying for it?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
No, you're not paying for it.

So the question is -- so let me --

(AUDIENCE SPEAKING OUT)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
All right, come on, come on.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Legislator, I have to ask you -- I mean -- I wanted to just ask you a question.

LEG. KRUPSKI:
We're all paying for -- this is a whole -- this is a social burden for the whole County. We're all paying for this, whether they go to one School District or another or where they're being transported, the question is, I think, more is how are these people being treated and how is the community that they're being placed in treated? And that's gotta to be a balance. And, you know, Legislator Kennedy's right, this is not going to -- you know, this is not going to go away, but it's also not the first time that this issue's come up before anyone in the County as to where these people -- these shelters are. There are distribution of different kind -- not just homeless shelters, but all these other different shelters throughout everyone's district -- you know, I've got one on my street. And that's just -- that's just the way it is. These people are in need of help.

So -- and I appreciate your work on it. And this is -- you know, the community's gotta be aware this is an ongoing process. This isn't -- I don't think this is the end today.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:
(Inaudible)

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
So if I could just clarify with the statistics, 70% of the children in a shelter go to school outside of that district. So the other facility we've been talking about, it's somewhere around 7% versus 93%. So it's better than the average by a lot.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Okay. Legislator Browning.

LEG. BROWNING:
Thank you, John. I actually was going to go back to that because knowing that I have the Tier II

Shelter in my district in Bellport, I believe there's a little over 70 families in the Tier II shelter. And I know there's always a concern that, you know, all of the kids are going to wind up in the same School District, in the School District where that shelter is.

I can -- I do know that over the past 20 years that Help Suffolk has been there, it's never really -- never happened. I believe there's approximately 30 children in the South Country School District that come from the Help Suffolk Tier II Shelter. So it's -- and, again, we know that these families, it's very fluid, they're very transient. And, you know, you always hope that within a few months that you're going to get them into permanent housing.

But if you can go back again to -- John talks about the McKinney-Vento and the right of the families to send their children back to the School District where they came from, can you get back into the billing issue with the school districts? If -- say they do come from another county, or anywhere else in the County and they're -- the kids who are now currently in the the Hauppauge School District, how does that billing work? What -- at what point in time does the School District bill the other district where that child came from? And is Hauppauge School District doing that?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
All right so let me -- I'll take it in pieces. I'll start with out-of-state children. There is no reimbursement mechanism for that. Okay. County level, so -- go to School District. So if it's a student, okay, that's being -- that came from -- let me say it this way: If a student is from New York State, any school in New York State, the School District can request reimbursement for that student. It's done at the State level. It's done through the school districts. It's not a DSS thing; it's not a County thing. That is New York State Education Law. I am not an expert on New York State Education on McKinney-Vento per se, but obviously I have a working knowledge.

So the School District is responsible for submitting what they call a stat form. It goes to New York State Ed. So Hauppauge says give me a plus. New York State says okay, a minus to this other School District. That's how it balances out. Obviously it's done on a reimbursement basis right after the fact. So whether the School District actually filed it or not, I don't know that for a fact if they did or they didn't.

LEG. BROWNING:
Okay. I just -- I was wondering if there was any relationship with you when --

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Sure. But I'll give -- I will give a specific example. A couple of times somebody has made comments, audience, I believe Legislator Kennedy referenced somebody from Brooklyn. So the Department actually researched that issue. What we found that this -- this former DSS -- Suffolk County DSS client in April of 2013, which was the prior school year, they moved into what we believe is permanency. They moved into Brooklyn. We don't have that information because they're not our client anymore. The School District that they chose to stay in, Hauppauge, if -- this is where, I believe, Legislator and I have -- I don't want to say a disagreement or a misunderstanding, if you will, if somebody has -- gets permanency, I do not believe that McKinney-Vento applies anymore because they're not homeless anymore and they have to be part of their own School District. But, again, that's something for the legal folks to work out.

Now having said that, let's say Legislator Kennedy was correct in that they can stay in the Hauppauge School District. Well, once they move to Brooklyn, they're no longer in Hauppauge School District, the School District should have stopped paying for that transportation. They're not responsibile for it. So if they continue to pay for it, which I heard was suggested here, they're wasting the taxpayers' money.

LEG. BROWNING:
You're telling me these kids are still going to Hauppauge but they're living in Brooklyn?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
That's what was alleged and that's what we were told, yes.

LEG. BROWNING:
And the School District is not billing for that?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
That's my understanding. So we actually -- because a search was made a couple of times, my office actually called the School District to get the name so we could actually research the issue and find out. Because I want to see if we were still paying for it, DSS, in some way, shape or form. So that's something -- there's a clear example of why this needs to be looked into.

LEG. KENNEDY:
But through the Chair, if I can, and this is something that the Commissioner and I have talked about and this is why today I will request that somebody come down from State Ed to go ahead and make it very clear as to what the impact to a district -- any district, we have 71 districts here; because what I've been told from the Hauppauge folks is that there is a 50-mile radius in which a district winds up bearing a transportation cost if, in fact, during the course of the school year the individual goes permanent.

Now, John, that's something that I guess we're going to have to reconcile. Because, as I said, you know, I go back -- I'm not going to reiterate all the other stuff, but like it not, we have, you know, 90 families under a roof right now. And as to Legislator Krupski's question and to your statement, 128 children going elsewhere, well then, perhaps the districts in all of your legislative districts are bearing the expense associated with that transportation. Although it's somewhat uncertain at this point that it goes specifically to the budgeting issue you spoke about. Because every School District throughout this Spring is going to come up and put up those budgets and be subject to that 2% cap. And then you introduce this element of randomness, there is no way to project for this. And what happens is it triggers an impact in this district or any other one. So as much as we're talking about it right here now in Hauppauge, it's life for all of us. We all have to be able to understand and basically deal with what the State and the Feds have put into place that compels this kind of local impact.

LEG. BROWNING:
Well, actually, John -- well, let me finish because I'd like to know how much is that -- how much is Hauppauge School District entitled to if they bill for those children from Brooklyn.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
I don't know. That's between the School District and them. That has nothing to do with DSS.

LEG. BROWNING:
No -- no, I know it has nothing to do with DSS. I just didn't know if you -- -

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
I couldn't -- I wouldn't guess.

LEG. BROWNING:
I would assume that the residents here should be calling their School District and asking why they haven't been billing --

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Correct.

LEG. BROWNING:
-- for these children from Brooklyn.

LEG. KENNEDY:
Again, through the Chair --

LEG. BROWNING:
Why I know Center Moriches School District it came up somewhere to the tune of $30,000 for the transportation of a child. And, you know, obviously that was the -- the expense was to the School District because one of the children was being transported. They had to pay for that. So I think definitely the residents here should be asking -- that's a lot of revenue on your end that you're losing by the School District not -- not billing.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
And -- and just to finish the question about the cost, so I talked about -- you know, if it was New York State -- a School District can only reimburse -- ask for reimbursement for expenses they actually incur. Just because somebody's there from out-of-state or from out of their district, it doesn't mean they were incurring costs, extra expense. They have to -- that's why the stat form has to be completed and then the information gets sent back from New York State Ed. They either approve or deny the request.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Okay.

LEG. KENNEDY:
Mr. Chair, can I just -- couple of more poignant questions, I think, for the Commissioner and then I'll yield.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Last questions.

LEG. KENNEDY:
Yep.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Okay, thank you.

LEG. KENNEDY:
The Tier II application right now for this shelter through OTDA is for how many families?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
I believe it's up to a hundred.

LEG. KENNEDY:
Okay. Part of what I'm going to ask through the Chair here is is, and, again, I think Legislator Barraga's comments probably were the most poignant of all. We're wrestling with a policy that, you know, has been an issue. But even as we're talking about your good faith effort to attempt to go ahead and establish more smaller shelters, we have this looming act with the State to regularize for at least 60 months over a hundred families there. At the very least, that ought to be put on hold.

You are to stop that, contact them and tell them there's issues for us to resolve here.

(APPLAUSE)

The other thing is is, and I just -- I need you to rebut this because there's a consistent representation or rumor out there that there are more shelters in the process. Motor Parkway, as a matter of fact, further down there was a hotel there. There's been discussion that -- now you've asserted over and over again you are not opening up any more large shelters. But then let me ask you, can any other agency -- is there a State agency that could do this? Is there a private agency? Do agencies have to check with you if they are making an effort to open up something along those lines?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
I don't know if somebody else is going to open up their own. They'd have to contract with Suffolk County, with DSS if they're to provide homeless services.

LEG. KENNEDY:
Okay.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
So the answer is no, not that I'm aware of. And no, I'm not looking to open up any new location.

LEG. KENNEDY:
No, you've said that repeatedly. I get that; I understand that. If it was any other type of agency, if it was a --

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
If it was any type of agency that's not County -- contracted with the County, why would they come to DSS? That's -- you know what I mean?

LEG. KENNEDY:
Okay. All right. Then I have to go to contact the individual owner to find out what's going on. All right. I'll yield. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Thank you. All right. That's it. We're going to get to the agenda.

TABLED RESOLUTIONS

We have Tabled Resolutions. **IR 1817, terminating a certain contract with Community Housing Innovations to provide Homeless Shelter Services.** I am going to make a motion to table.

(AUDIENCE OUTBURSTS)

LEG. BARRAGA:
Mr. Chairman, I'd like to make a motion to approve:

(APPLAUSE)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Okay. We have a motion to approve, a motion to table.

LEG. BROWNING:
I guess I'll -- I'll second the tabling motion.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Okay, we have a second to table.

LEG. KRUPSKI:
On the motion.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
On the motion Legislator Krupski.

LEG. KRUPSKI:
Question for the Commissioner. If this was -- if this IR 1817 is passed and we terminate the contract with Community Housing Innovations, what would -- what are the implications for your department in trying to place these families? How does that work mechanically? Because now --

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
So hypothetically --

LEG. KRUPSKI:
That's -- that's saying -- that's saying that we can just say, we're -- we're going to close this shelter tomorrow or in a week or something, and forgetting the part of legally breaking the contract, which I don't know anything about, so forget that part of it, how could you -- where would you put these --

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Sure. Hypothetically, we'd put them back in motel rooms at a much higher expense to the County with less services. So it'd probably cost somewhere in the neighborhood on an annualized basis roughly $7 million.

LEG. KENNEDY:
Through the Chair, though, let's make sure that we're very clear here. The termination provision is a 90-day notice. And I'm going to now ask, if I can through the Chair, the County Attorney up here, this contract in particular was modified from the standard County contract. And I believe it allows for a -- atypically long notice in termination period. Is that correct, Dennis? It's not like we would be putting people out next week.

MR. BROWN:
No, that is -- I mean that is correct as far as the termination period is concerned.

LEG. KENNEDY:
So even if this Committee was to pass the bill today and we were to pass it on Tuesday, Legislator Krupski, there would be notice. And then there would be at a minimum three months before anybody would have to be moved out of that facility to someplace else.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Legislator Browning.

LEG. BROWNING:
I understand that, John, but the issue still being whether it be today, tomorrow, next week or in three months, I think we're still going to have the same problem. And not to forget that this is Safety Net. So this cost is going to be a cost to Suffolk County taxpayers. So that $7 million, I believe, 79% of that $7 million will be --

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Not all the families are Safety Net. Some are TANF.

LEG. BROWNING:
Okay, okay.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Significant are TANF --

LEG. BROWNING:
Okay. So, you know, the problem will still exist. In three months I don't think --

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
It doesn't change --

LEG. BROWNING:
-- that the County's going to be able to find somewhere to place these families. You know, and, again, we want to talk about a burden, my district -- and I am going to say it -- human beings are not a burden. They're people. And, you know, Christmas is coming. Who wants to be homeless at Christmas, you know? And I'm trying to be sensitive to the issue because I've been to the homeless shelter in my district. I've visited those families. And no one wants to live like they live. So I'm trying to be more sensitive to the issue and say -- to shove them back in a motel -- I would like to see that we would respect --

(AUDIENCE SPEAKING OUT)

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
No outbursts from the audience, please.

LEG. BROWNING:
What Legislator Barraga had recommended, that we look to reduce the number. And I think obviously because of the families being so transient, you know, the number has dropped in the School District. So, again, with the shelter, if it does become a Tier II shelter, I would like to see that it wouldn't be a hundred families, that we could reduce that by 50%. And I know it's not an easy task. Because it doesn't matter what district you put it in, it's never going to be wanted.

I know that, you know, Legislator Gregory is talking about, you know, the homeless shelter that's opening up in his district. CHI is the contractor. So you have a difficult job. And to have to deal with homelessness is not an easy issue to handle because nobody wants it in their backyard. Nobody. But we have to try and be a little bit more sensitive to it.

So at this time I can't see passing it because I don't think in three months this problem's going to be gone and there won't be homelessness because I can tell you the Tier II shelter in -- Help Suffolk, when it was opened up, they said, you know, they were going to cancel it in 15 years. And the comment was back then was *well, in 15 years we won't have homelessness.* Well guess what? It's probably worse today than when it was then.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Probably triple since then.

LEG. BROWNING:
So -- and that's why I'm supporting the tabling motion. I'm going to talk to John. You know, I was over here having a conversation with John to try and work something out that works for all of us.

And I do -- you know, I don't know if we can do something that would -- maybe, Dennis, you can respond to this, is, you know, we look at our school districts and how many children are in a School District, Hauppauge being 4900, you know, the William Floyd School District is about 10,000 children. I believe Longwood is about the same. So if we were to say no more than a certain percentage per School District, would that be challenged by the State or the Federal?

MR. BROWN:
We'd have to look into that for you.

LEG. BROWNING:
Okay. I think that's something that we should maybe here consider.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Okay. We have a tabling motion and no second on the approval. Tabling motion is before us. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions?

LEG. BARRAGA:
Oppose to tabling.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Okay, tabling motion passes. **(VOTE: 3-1-0-0)**

IR 2071, Accepting and appropriating 100% grant funding in the amount of $59,998 from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services to the Suffolk County Department of Social Services for a Child Care Fraud Prevention and Detection Incentive Grant. (Co. Exec.) I make a motion to approve and place on the consent calender.

LEG. BARRAGA:
Second.

CHAIRMAN GREGORY:
Second by Legislator Barraga. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? **(VOTE: 4-0-0-0)**

Okay, we stand adjourned. Thank you, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:
Thank you. Merry Christmas, happy holidays.

THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 11:43 AM
{ } DENOTES SPELLED PHONETICALLY