

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 January 28, 2013.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Leg. DuWayne Gregory, Vice Chair
Leg. Kate M. Browning
Leg. Albert Krupski, Jr.

MEMBERS NOT PRESENT:

Leg. Ricardo Montano - Excused Absence
Leg. Thomas F. Barraga - Excused Absence

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

George M. Nolan, Counsel to the Legislature
Sarah Simpson, Assistant Counsel to the Legislature
Renee Ortiz, Chief Deputy Clerk of the Legislature
Robert Lipp, Acting Director/Budget Review Office
Diane Dono, Budget Review Office
Bob Martinez, Aide to Legislator Montano
Ali Nazir, Aide to Legislator Kennedy
Michael Pitcher, Aide to Presiding Officer
Thomas Vaughn, County Executive Assistant III
Gregory Blass, Commissioner/Department of Social Services
John O'Neill, Deputy Commissioner/DSS
John Nieves, Suffolk County Department of Social Services
Linda O'Donohoe, Assistant to Commissioner Blass
Reverend Roderick Pearson, Suffolk County Youth Bureau
Marie Berkoski, County Executive Aide
Dr. Pamela Allen, Family Life Center
Dr. Zorina Costello
Julia Jackson, Family Life Center
Rachel Williams-Bailey, Director, New Beginnings
Reverend England, Family Life Center
Falischa Jones, Family Life Center
And all other interested parties

MINUTES TAKEN BY:

Diana Flesher, Court Stenographer

MINUTES TAKEN BY:

Kim Castiglione, Legislative Secretary

(THE COMMITTEE WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 10:01 A.M.)

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

Good morning, everyone. We're going to get started. Welcome to the first of the year committee meeting, the Human Services Committee. We have Chairman Montano who has an excused absence, as well as Legislator Barraga. If you all please would stand, we'll have Legislator Krupski, our newest member, say the Pledge of Allegiance.

SALUTATION

If you all would please remain standing for a moment of silence for our men and women overseas.

MOMENT OF SILENCE OBSERVED

Again, good morning. I'm Legislator DuWayne Gregory. I'm the Vice Chair of the Human Services Committee. I'll be presiding over today's meeting. We have a light agenda, but I understand there has been a last minute presentation that's been added to the agenda, and I will ask that -- Reverend Pearson, please come forward.

Good morning, Director. That's your title right, Director or?

REVEREND PEARSON:

It changes every day. Executive Director.

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

We're safe to say Reverend Pearson, right?

REVEREND PEARSON:

It's safe to say that.

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

From what I understand, there is, as the Director of Human Services, which encompasses the Youth Bureau, I understand that there is a presentation that -- that your office is requesting?

MR. VAUGHN:

Yes, thank you very much, Legislator, and we certainly appreciate the indulgence of the Human Services Committee this morning. We do actually have a presentation this morning from Dr. Pam Allen of the Family Life Center as it pertains to the Wyandanch Youth Center. We'd like, with your indulgence, to be able to call her up now and have her kind of run through the vision that they have and their exciting plans for that center.

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

Okay. Does anyone -- sure.

MR. VAUGHN:

Dr. Allen?

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

Okay. We'll have the presentation and then afterwards we'll go to the public portion.

MR. VAUGHN:

Dr. Allen, you can have a seat right here.

DR. ALLEN:

Good morning. Can you hear me? Do I need to adjust this mike? I feel like Hilary Clinton. Good morning. My name is Dr. Pamela Allen, A-L-L-E-N. I'm here on behalf of the Family Life Center in

Wyandanch. I'm here with a proposal on behalf of the Family Life Center for the Wyandanch Youth Center at 20 Andrews Avenue in Wyandanch. Let me tell you about the Family Life Center.

First, the Family Life Center is a 501(3)(c) agency started in September of 2009 by Reverend Constance Davis England, Rachel Baily and Yvonne Phinizy. It's a community based organization focused on delivering a broad band of supportive services to adults and children. We seek to equip individuals with knowledge and skills to achieve the best social, economic, educational, health and occupational outcomes in their lives. We provide emotional and social support through a wide range of services. Our mission is to preserve, strengthen and empower. Our goal is to develop and promote intellectually, emotionally and physically healthy children and families. We do that through intellectual health, emotional health, physical health and financial and health.

Citydata.com has published statistics on the Hamlet of Wyandanch saying that the population has a 65% high school education. We go down to 7% for Associate's and Bachelor's Degrees. We go down to 2% reported to have a graduate or a professional degree. In response to that, we propose to open the Andrews Avenue under new management of the Family Life Center, to increase the hours of operation to fully serve the Wyandanch community, to open partnerships to allow more agencies to provide services to the Wyandanch community, and to increase the number of programs and facilities. If you look at the hours of operation you'll see that that center currently on the published schedule is open 27 hours a week. We propose to open it for 72 hours a week to provide services to the community.

We had a survey conducted by the Mother's Club in Wyandanch and the Wyandanch Public School District of high school and middle school children. Forty-seven percent of the high school population was surveyed. Of that population, 78% of the students have never been in the youth center; 92% of them have not been in the last year or more. In the middle school, 56% of population surveyed, 64% have never been in the youth center; 73% have not been in the last year.

The Family Life Center's current programs that will operate in that facility will be the New Beginnings Parent Enrichment Program, modeled after the Harlem Children's Zone Baby College, and in collaboration with SUNY Farmingdale. That program offers science, technology, engineering, and mathematics with an emphasis on language development. It teaches parents the best practices in child development, and it offers workshops in behavior management and workshops in nutrition and budgeting. That program is currently in operation with a group of children ages four to six with Farmingdale College. They participated in the STEM technology competition this year, the youngest group, and not only did they present a project that was outstanding, but they actually won a prize for their participation and for the work that they did.

The Family Life Center is also offering counseling services at this time to the community, and to address the needs of families and to support the development of youth they are offering individual and family counseling, parent and child relationship building, domestic violence counseling, group therapy, crisis intervention, case management services, and of course intake referral and follow-up.

Research has proven that if we can help families and children prepare for school by understanding and completing their homework, we can increase school success, improve attitudes towards school, improve attendance, decrease dropout rates, and therefore increase graduation rates.

With that in mind, the Family Life Center started a Homework Help Program in September of 2012 to provide free after school help to Wyandanch children. The goals of the Family Life Center Homework Help Program are to address four areas of concern: Increase academic performance, increase reading level, improve test scores and reduce high school dropout rate. The homework Help Program provides assistance to students grade K through 8 with a high school component of test prep and peer homework help, also providing internet access in a community where many children do not have computers or internet access, nutritious snacks daily, which have been provided by the Suffolk County Police Department for the last four months, and high school student service learners, which is a major part of our program.

The community has responded with a persistent demand for the Homework Help Program's expansion. We now have over 50 children enrolled, with new children enrolling every day. The schools have many children waiting for our ability to accommodate more students. I have visited every school in the Wyandanch district and we have been told that they have children waiting because they desperately need our help. We're in a community where grandmothers are raising children. The grandmothers cannot do the homework. Many of the parents can't do the homework. But it's a big assistance for us to be there for these people to bring their children to us every day to do the homework, because we want to be there. We are volunteering right now. We have been and it's been very successful.

I have parents here who will stand to let you know that we had -- I had a grandparent approach me in the community to say my granddaughter made the honor roll for the first time. She's in the 8th grade. If you have children, you know how important it is to celebrate the honor roll. This child made the honor roll for the first time in the 8th grade because she's in Homework Help. Miss Kitty, please stand.

We have another child who has been -- who had been identified as a possible retention student early in the year in writing from his school district. This child came in and said, "I don't do homework". He's been coming to do homework, not only -- and he's brilliant and wonderful. He just needed to have someone to help him really see that. Not only has he been doing his homework, improved his grades, made the honor roll, he ran for an office in the student body and won, coming to Homework Help every day practicing his speech. Mark's mom, would you please stand? Miss Karen. Thank you.

So we want to be there to accommodate these children and to help them. We have had such wonderful successes. We've had children who come in and who cried every day, but they come in skipping and laughing and happy and pleased, and we have a wonderful time providing this service for them and we want to do more. We need to do more. There is a need in our community.

The Wyandanch community Center on 20 Andrews Avenue provides the Family Life Center with an opportunity to increase and enhance programs and facility use for the Wyandanch community. Utilizing the data from the survey we found that the children in the Wyandanch community are looking for programs that provide the following: Academic enrichment, sports and fitness, performing arts, computer and technology. I see you just got your sheets and I am on 15. I saw someone just hand them out to you. Okay. I just saw her hand them out, I thought you just got them. The Wyandanch Youth Center, under the direction of the Family Life Center proposes to offer the following service to meet the needs and expressed interest of the Wyandanch community through the services and developing lasting relationships.

So they expressed an interest in academic enrichment. We are offering academic support. STEM, science, technology and mathematics. Computer literacy, beginning conversational Spanish, English language learners and a community chess club. They want sports and fitness activities. We are offering football, basketball, wrestling, dance, cheerleading, physical fitness activities for children, mommy and me exercises, low impact exercise, meditation and aerobics. The community has said that they want community health. We are offering a community health initiative. Nutrition, wellness and disease, HIV awareness.

We are also building the community through cultural enhancement. We are offering community service projects, understanding your voting rights, holiday and cultural celebrations, reducing your carbon footprint, finance and budgeting, community empowering fundraisers, and a Wyandanch community 5K run.

The Family Life Center is developing partnerships to provide services to the Wyandanch community. Now, the following agencies have current, fully operational programs providing services to the Wyandanch community. They have committed to make the Wyandanch Youth Center their central location for the programs listed here. Those agencies are in partnership with the Family Life Center.

The Wyandanch Union Free School District, that would like to offer before school program, home instruction for short-term suspensions, tutoring at risk students, workshops on violence prevention, drug and alcohol prevention and anti-drug programs.

Another partner is the Economic Opportunity Counsel of Suffolk County, with immediate services to be offered in family development for families of children encountering difficulties such as homelessness and DSS issues. Teen mother support groups. Summer programs for employment readiness and college preparation. Parent workshops. The Wyandanch Junior Warriors is another partner offering cheerleading, outdoor football, indoor football, wrestling, boxing. We have Teen Green as a partner run by Danny Green, and that is an at risk young adult gang prevention program, a three on three basketball program.

Suffolk County Police Department, who has already been working with us and has had a very noticeable presence. They have been the group that has sponsored the nutritious and hot snacks for the children daily. They come in just to stop and speak with the children, to have a presence and to develop a relationship with our children and it's very important to have that and to have that positive image for our kids in this Homework Help. And they're provide, COTA, the Counsel of Thought and Action, they are providing pal activities, nutritious snacks, which will be continuing, community relations and they will support safe and secure environment.

Our main partner is the Wyandanch community, and we certainly hope that you will give us an opportunity to develop that partnership by providing all of these services at 20 Andrews Avenue with the Family Life Center. Thank you.

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

Thank you, Dr. Allen. Does anyone have any questions? Okay, Legislator Krupski.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

What size is the district?

DR. ALLEN:

The population of Wyandanch?

LEG. KRUPSKI:

No, the school district.

DR. ALLEN:

Oh, sorry.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Ballpark, current enrollment.

DR. ALLEN:

Can I ask -- turn around?

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Sure.

DR. ALLEN:

Our school district is about a thousand, 1,200.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

High school or the whole -- elementary and everything?

DR. ALLEN:

The high school population is on here, on that survey. Does anyone know offhand what the high school population --

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Four seventy-seven high school.

DR. ALLEN:

Four seventy-seven high school.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Okay.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

And middle school 465.

DR. ALLEN:

Middle school, 465, as stated on the survey.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Thank you. And how's the enrollment? Is it fluctuating or is it stable?

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

It fluctuates.

DR. ALLEN:

We have a very transient community.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

But I mean a lot? Or -- I mean, because I know some school districts are --

DR. ALLEN:

We're not closing schools if that's what you're --

LEG. KRUPSKI:

No, no, no, no. Just to get an idea about the student population.

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

It's a small, relatively small, district. I think the total high school is about the size of my senior class when I went to school.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

It's about the same size as Mattituck.

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

Okay. Anything else?

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Thank you.

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

Legislator Browning.

LEG. BROWNING:

Hi. I have to say I'm very impressed with your presentation, and it sounds like you've already hit the ground running. In my school bus days I used to drive in the Wyandanch area, that was many years ago, with the special needs kids, so I'm very familiar with the community. I think it's time that the community got what it needs and what it deserves, and it certainly deserves all the help and support and especially from us. So I believe there is a CN coming on Tuesday?

MR. VAUGHN:

Yes, Legislator Browning. We will be bringing forward a Certificate of Necessity to make this happen as quickly as possible, because we are excited as well about the possibilities and about all the things that were discussed here today. We think that it's really going to be an outstanding thing for the community.

DR. ALLEN:

We're very excited about the potential for Wyandanch. You'll find that the people on this committee are all Wyandanch graduates. I am a Wyandanch graduate, so we know there is tremendous potential to produce wonderful people out of that community. We just want an opportunity to do that.

LEG. BROWNING:

And we certainly want to help you with that, so good luck. And like I said, I think this is great and I congratulate you and I wish you a lot of luck.

DR. ALLEN:

Thank you.

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

Thank you, Dr. Allen. You and the Life Center are doing tremendous things. I look forward to working with you. As the committee is familiar, and I think some of colleagues already know that there's going to be a CN next Tuesday on the 5th at the General Meeting by way of a budget amendment to the current monies that are allocated to the Wyandanch Youth Services. That would be amending the budget to allocate those funds to the Wyandanch -- excuse me -- the Familiar Life Center so that the residents and the families, particularly the children of the Wyandanch community, can get the services that they deserve that unfortunately they're not receiving right now. Okay, thank you.

We're going to go to the public portion. We do have several cards. We have -- each speaker has three minutes. The first speaker -- the first card I have is Julia Jackson.

MS. JACKSON:

My name is Julia Jackson from Family Life Center. Initially we thought we had to take parts of the presentation, but it was all done by Dr. Allen.

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

Okay. All right. Thank you.

MS. JACKSON:

I think I was supposed to include that I'm definitely in support of Family Life Center taking over the Wyandanch Youth Center. I'm instrumentally working with the Homework Help Program and we are seeing tremendous, tremendous success with our children. So we would just like to be able to continue that.

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

Okay, great. Thank you. Rachel Williams-Bailey.

MS. WILLIAMS-BAILEY:

Good morning everyone, and thank you for this opportunity to let us share our program with you. I'm the Director of New Beginnings, which is modeled after the Harlem Children Zone's Baby College, and this is one of the first programs of the Family Life Center. And I just want to tell you a little bit more about it in that we have parenting classes for adults, and along with that, at the same time we have classes for our children from the ages of preschool through middle school. And those classes stimulate and encourage and reinforce language development, but with the emphasis on STEM. And in doing that, our children participated in the Farmingdale College's STEMS Program last spring and our experiment was blue glue colloid experiment. Our children, our first and second graders were the youngest children that participated in this conference, and they all received certificates.

So I am so excited and so thrilled that we have the opportunity of expanding, and our next New Beginnings workshops begin February 8th, and we've been doing this for the last four years. This is our eighth cycle. So thank you so much for supporting our efforts.

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

Thank you. Reverend England.

REVEREND ENGLAND:

A little redundant but I also would like to thank you very much for hearing us today and it's an honor to be here, to have the opportunity to actually speak about the work that's taking place in Wyandanch. As Ms. Williams-Bailey spoke and said that we have been doing this for four years, that's indeed true, and we have been doing it on a voluntary basis. But I am the overall Director of the Family Life Center. I do, along with Ms. Yvonne Phinizy, who is not here with us today, I'm an LCSW and Miss Yvonne is an LCSW. Ms. Rachel Bailey is a Masters level educator as well. We have put many, many hours into the children and the families of Wyandanch because we are graduates of the Wyandanch High School. We remember Wyandanch and we remember what it was, and we know that it can be that again if given the right opportunities.

We have partnered with Suffolk County CPS as well, so many of the cases that are Wyandanch cases they are referring them now to us. We provide those counseling sessions to address many of the issues that are plaguing that community and we have had many successes, not all, but we know that if we continue things can only get better.

So we thank you for this opportunity to bring about change, to help those who have not been able to help themselves, and we know that God created this particular time for us to look at Wyandanch, take a good look at Wyandanch, and know that there is good and there is some good that can come out of Wyandanch. I know we read a lot of articles and it never says anything positive usually about Wyandanch, but I am here and we're here to show you that there are many positive people in Wyandanch who are concerned about the children in particularly in Wyandanch. So again, thank you so very much. Thank you, thank you, thank you for this opportunity.

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

Thank you. Falischa Jones. And I've never known you to be shy, so don't start now.

MS. JONES:

Good morning. My name is Falischa Jones. I actually work for the Family Life Center and I just really wanted to let you know that I am in support, definitely, of Family Life Center taking over the youth center and just bringing in new programs and new services for the community. I currently have the pleasure of working with them with the Homework Help Program and it's actually quite interesting to see kids come in and get excited -- and they get attached to us -- every day, and they want to tell us everything that's going on or what's going on at home or in school, and they don't have places like that within the community. They can't go to the youth center now and do that. They don't have that relationship and that bond, and I find that we have a great relationship with all of these children and we just want to be able to branch out and reach out to as many kids as we

possibly can. And that's it, thank you.

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

Thank you, Falischa. Okay. Dr. Zorina Costello.

DR. COSTELLO:

Good morning. My name is Reverend Dr. Zorina Costello, and I'm not a resident of Wyandanch, but I am a supporter of this program. I have been a volunteer for both the New Beginnings Program and some of the aspects of the Family Life Center. One of the things I want to address and talk about is that on last Thursday I was able to go to the Homework Help Club and observe the children. There were about 16 children there who were fully engaged in their academic work of doing their homework, but not only were they doing homework, they were learning socialization skills because as they are sitting at the tables with the volunteers, sometimes they have to wait for help because the numbers of children that are showing up, sometimes the volunteers are not able to give individual attention to each child exactly at the time when the child may want it. So they are learning that they have to wait and they are also listening to the information that the other children are getting about their homework.

The other thing that I observed is the cross-cultural and multicultural opportunities that are there. I'm also a bilingual counselor and so I speak Spanish and English. I think we all know how important it is in these days and times to give attention to the needs of the interactions of all the persons in the community no matter what ethnicity they are from, but because there's a growing population in the Wyandanch community of speakers of other languages we need to pay attention to that as well, and as we create programs continue to open up opportunities for the exchange and the giving of information in other languages as we can.

I have been part of New Beginnings and been able to translate some of our curriculum to parents who have been referred to us and have a need for parenting education and don't speak -- and don't speak English. And so as we're also giving them information in English so they have the opportunity to learn English while they're receiving their information in Spanish. So I think this is another aspect of the program that's very important and we're meeting a specific need that perhaps we need to take a closer look at. Thank you so much.

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

Thank you. I don't have any other cards. Excuse me. Was there anyone else in the audience that would like to speak? Okay. All right. We'll go to the agenda. Actually, I think we'll call up the Commissioner. Commissioner Blass.

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

Good morning, Mr. Vice-Chair.

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

Good morning, Commissioner. And let me just say I am saddened about your leaving. It's a big loss to the County. You have been a tremendous asset, and thank you for your decades of service as a Judge, as a Legislator, as a Commissioner and all your roles and capacities. You have done Suffolk County a tremendous service and we're very grateful.

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And speaking of previous lives, I want to congratulate Legislator Krupski on his ascension to the esteemed Legislature. Having sat in that very seat I know the challenges that lie ahead and I know that they will be met by a capable individual with a great background. I wish you every success as a representative. And you'll be my Legislator, too, and if there's anything I can do to help out in your tenure, don't hesitate to ask.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Thank you. I appreciate that.

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

I also would like to take a moment, Mr. Chairman, to introduce to you, if he needs an introduction, which I don't think he does, on my right is John Nieves. John is going to be assuming the role of our Communications Director and spokesman for the department. He is also going to be replacing, if that can ever be achieved, Roland Hampson. Roland is moving on to take charge of the Child Care Unit. It's a first programmatic supervision -- supervisory role that Roland is taking. And it's -- in the Navy we used to say it's like getting command at sea, he finally is going to have a chance to be in charge of a specific unit that has a programmatic function. He was in charge, as John will be, of our Commissioner's Response Unit, and John will also be assuming the role of overseeing a lot of the activities of the Commissioner's Office and of the department. We're very proud to have him come on board in that capacity. He had previously been on our crew team and he has worked in the Commissioner's Office in a number of areas and he also has a background in the Medicaid Unit where he has been for a number of -- for a period of time now, a Social Services Examiner II, and we have a lot of hope for him in the office, a lot of potential.

On my left, of course, is John O'Neill, Deputy Commissioner, and he will also be working closely with Legislator Krupski and the other Legislators as the tenure of the Commissioner change occurs. My last day is Wednesday, and the County Executive will soon make known his decision. It's his timing, as it should be. He's the elected Executive of the County and he appoints the Commissioner with the Legislature's advice and consent, and we look forward to that.

I do want to say it's been a pleasure working with this committee, with Chairman Gregory, with Chairman Browning prior to him, and I found the Commissioner's Office to be a fascinating job to fill. Even though you're consistently between a rock and a hard place, what with the State of New York's regulatory oversight, with the County and the County Legislature and Executive, with the various contract agencies, we have hundreds of them. It's a huge department with enormous responsibility, but the fascinating thing about it is that every single person, every worker in the department, as in the Legislature, is blessed with usefulness. And it gives you a chance to make a difference in the lives of literally thousands of people every day who are in usually desperate need.

And for those who would question some of the programs in saying that there are too many people on food stamps or the programs are out of control, the fact is if those critics would open their eyes and open their hearts, they'd recognize that there are more people seeking help because there are more people than ever needing help. And the magic of these programs is that they allow individuals to enter a path of becoming once again self-sustaining, and I think the department has made some great inroads in restoring some shattered lives with some help that they deserve and need. As Lincoln said, the purpose of government is to help those who cannot help themselves. That's what the role of Social Services, and this committee, has been all about and we greatly appreciate the committee's cooperation and oversight.

Our congratulations also to Legislator Montano for his having assumed the Chair, and I would like to say I would look forward to working with him, but I notice as he's coming in, I'm going out. But as with him as with all of you, I'll be available for any role I can play to assist in the function of this great department.

And with that, there are just a couple of parting comments I'd like to make about the Governor's budget proposal, and indeed it is a proposal. And as a proposal it is subject to amendment, and there are two areas of concern that greatly deserve consideration for amendment. The first relates to the Child Care Block Grant. As you know, we have had a considerable difficulty in reducing those eligible for child care because the funding was reduced when it was budgeted last fiscal year. Well, the budget proposal for this fiscal year for the Child Care Block Grant for all the counties is the same in terms of numbers, same in terms of dollars.

That means that we are still going to maintain eligibility at the poverty level. We will not be able to go back to the point where we were at 200% of the poverty level, which is not really very much for Long Island. And again, talking about self-sustainability, that's where child care comes in. It

enables families who are struggling to get back on their feet to have a subsidy to assist them with child care expenses so that they can find employment and keep it. It's worked successfully. It works well in many respects. The problem is that we had to go from 200% of the poverty level as funding dried up to 185%, now down to the poverty level itself, meaning that if a family of four makes more than \$24,050 a year on Long Island, that they are not eligible for childcare. They have to be at that amount or below.

And I noticed that from some communication we had with our -- one of our important contract agencies, the Child Care Council where Janet Walerstein and Brian Lahiff are actively involved, they shared with us that the Empire Justice Center will be asking the Governor for a 30 day amendment to increase the State appropriation by 92 million, because last year with the reduction in the block grant to what it was for Suffolk County, the Governor indicated that there was going to be a \$215 million increase in the Child Care Block Grant for -- statewide, and that's not quite what happened. It's, as I said, flat from last year. And if there's any input that can be made to the State Delegation it would be in regard to the Child Care Block Grant, or at least an amendment to the formula that the Office of Children and Family Services uses, the State Office of Children and Family Services, uses in formulating and deciding what counties get what amount. And the amount that they gave County for two years in a row now, pray that it won't be three years in a row, has been inadequate and it is of great concern to us.

Another area of concern that also on involves the Office of Children and Family Services' budget relates to the placement facilities for troubled youth. Now, for the past number of years high risk youth, whose records, whose difficulties and issues, whether it's fire setting or violent activity, gang involvement, many of them are unable to be placed in facilities that the counties operate. And as a result, they were placed in facilities usually referred to as medium secure or even non-secure facilities that OCFS maintains and operates on a State level.

Well, we were given some hint of the past couple of few months that this was going to change, but we did not know the change was going to be, as it was announced to us the other day, namely that OCFS, by virtue of the Governor's proposal for the budget, is shutting down all of these facilities for troubled youth, and that these facilities will be replaced with a budget allocation for each county. The problem is the budget allocation for each county to take charge of these troubled youth is \$1,044,000. That's for the entire State. Everybody gets to share a whopping \$1,044,000.

Now, we were favored with the euphemism that it will only be -- that's only for the first quarter of the fiscal year, meaning or implying that there'll be more funding considered later. Well, the fact remains that the budget allocation as proposed as of now shuts down all of the facilities and leaves several -- a number of counties to share merely \$1,044,000 for everybody, a very inadequate sum. But what's of more concern is not just the quantitative aspect of the budget, but the qualitative decision that's being made. The State in effect is abdicating its responsibility to house and rehabilitate high risk youth through a budget proposal, a very questionable approach. But the practical effect of that is that the State of New York is really leaving it to the counties to take back these troubled youth.

Now, the County of Suffolk has over 50 children up to the age of 18 years who are in these situations. And our concern is from the preliminary and informal discussions we've had with some of our contract agencies, is that there is no contract agency whose Board of Directors is willing to take on the liability of this responsibility. They don't have the facilities to do it. They don't have the staff to do it. They don't have the expertise to do it.

So we have, as we have been told, until 31 January 2013, in other words this January, to implement it. And we haven't even the slightest idea of what contract agency will do this. And if one comes forward and miraculously says this is something we want to do with this population, if that development occurs, well then where would they ever be able to put a facility that is responsible for housing, if not placing and taking secure responsibility for, this high risk population. Look what we go through just to get a homeless family shelter in a community. A homeless family shelter whose

profile is only mainly single mothers with preschool aged children. That is next to impossible to accomplish, but a facility for high risk youth located in any community would be exactly such a problem as to prevent a Board of Directors of a contract agency to take it on. So we are convinced that the only approach is to strongly suggest to the Legislative Delegation that this budget proposal be changed.

Overall, though, the budget proposal does nothing really other than those two points to hurt us. We continue to see the Safety Net reimbursement, no longer the 50-50 share, Safety Net Social Services Program. We're one of the only states that has it anymore. The State of New York mandates it, does not fund it much by anything. We pay 79% of the cost while the State kicks in only 21% now, and it's a multimillion dollar project. As you will recall, we had a shortfall earlier. We hope to not have that shortfall problem to present to you again for this year. We think we are adequately budgeted for it. But I just think that the State needs careful monitoring in terms of its budget practices.

The one last thing I did want to share with you concerns Child Protective Services. We are very grateful that the County Executive has restored the automatic backfill of Child Protective Services caseworker vacancies, and we are very concerned that in the interim when the automatic backfill of vacant positions was suspended, it was a major accomplishment of the previous administration, but then the budget difficulties caused them to discontinue it in the late -- in the last quarter of 2012.

Well, between then and the time that the County Executive of the current administration restored it, we had about 18 vacancies occur, and lo and behold, those vacancies were abolished. So we are 18 Child Protective Services caseworkers short of where we should be. We have one less Child Protective Services investigative team as a result of it. And if there's anything that I would strongly suggest is that the Legislature give careful consideration, as I have offered this point as well to the County Executive's Office, the most careful consideration to restoring, somehow find it, the 18 positions that were eliminated in the budget, the normal budget process where vacancies were routinely eliminated for the obvious reason that there's no money anywhere. If the funding can be found, though, there is a reimbursement rate for it. The 18 positions are a very serious gap in the structure of CPS.

Generally speaking as I close, the department I leave I think, thanks to this committee, thanks to the County Executive, thanks to the gentlemen on my left and right, thanks to Linda in the back, thanks to Roland, thanks to so many individuals who have made it possible, I think this department is being left in good hands. I think it's going to be left in good shape, but it is a department that has ever increasing demands upon it. Every program continues to spiral. There is no leveling off that's even apparent on the horizon no matter what program you're talking about, whether it's the sheltering of the homeless, whether it's food stamps, whether it's the HEAP Program, whether it's Medicaid, whether it is child care, or centers, you name it. We are all on the verge of a serious shortfall if the tidal wave that keeps coming at the department continues at the rate it has been. It needs the most careful attention and I'm very confident that the department's management and workers will meet it. It's going to mean support and a lot of it, and that's how I want to close, by thanking, above all, the workers of the department.

They have been the best as I've said many times. They have worked under the harshest conditions. A lot of management efficiencies made them even more effective at what they do, but they are without question in my mind when it comes to any department, DSS is the A Team of Suffolk County. I'm proud of the work that they do. I'm grateful that they're doing it as well as they do. They are dedicated and committed; they are certainly the best. Thanks very much for your support.

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

Thank you, Commissioner for your thoughts and concerns. Those certainly are something worthy of concern. I think, again, it's unfortunate we're seeing the same issue with the Child Care Block Grant and this new issue with the placement of high risk. Is that similar to what organizations like

Hope for Youth do and Timothy Hill?

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

They are the agencies that we use and the court system, main the Family Court system, use for youth who have had run-ins with the law, but who are manageable. But the high risk youth are the ones that are impossible to place in any existing facilities on Long Island. So Timothy Hill and Hope for Youth, Family Service League, Catholic Charities and so many others really do not have the capacity to take the responsibility of this population. This has always been the State's. It's an interesting legal question as to whether the State's assumption of the custody of these cases until they can be rehabilitated can really be subordinated to a budget proposal. I don't know if that -- I know it's worked for the State before and gone unchallenged, but in this instance some very careful dialogue has to be entered into between the administrations of Albany and Hauppauge. If it keeps the track that it has, I strongly doubt we could be ready for it.

VICE-CHAIR GREGORY:

Okay. Anyone have any questions? Legislator Browning.

LEG. BROWNING:

Okay. Well, first of all, as I know I've called you and I'm sorry to see you're leaving too, because you put up with me a lot over the past few years, not just as Chair of the committee, but as a Legislator and the issues in my district, so I can't say enough thank you's for all of the help and support that you've given me. When it comes to the sober home issue I don't think we'd be where we are today without your help and support. We're actually getting somewhere, we're actually starting to see the RFP's going out. I'm very excited about it. I wish we could get more money from the State to make this a better program, but the fact of the matter is, is that we are actually doing something positive to finally regulate some sober homes and get some good homes for people in need. We need more of that and it's a shame that the State is continually cutting our funding.

And, again, that goes to going back to OCFS, and -- oh, he's gone. Legislator Montano's Aide Rob was sitting behind me and I turned around and I said -- and we said it at the same time. Look what they did, Pilgrim State in Kings Park when they closed them. They made no plan. And this is clearly another funding cut and a way to say we're go to do something different, but they're not putting any money behind any of this. So what happened when they closed the mental health facilities? We wound up with homelessness, we wound up with these unregulated sober homes, we wind up seeing these people in jail where they really don't belong, and John J. Foley's got a lot of them.

So, you know, we're going to see another problem, only it's going to be a younger group of kids, that they are going to wind up -- our jail's going to become overcrowded again now with young offenders. We're going to see homeless young offenders. I could see this as a recipe for disaster if there is no plan. I know that CJCC, there's been concerns at the CJCC meetings with what the plans are. I know that they're trying to come up with the solution, but again, if there's no financial support it's going to fail. And I hate to say that, but it will.

I want to say congratulations, John. It's nice to get you back to working with you again. I know my office was ecstatic when they heard that you were back in the Commissioner's Office. You have been a phenomenal support to my office. I can't say enough about the work that you've done. I know you're a fantastic worker. You can get things done and that's -- you know that's what I need out of my office.

So again, Commissioner, I'm saddened to see you leave. I can't say enough and it's going to be very hard to fill your shoes, and I hope that the County Executive seriously looks. You're very compassionate about what you do, and again, the workers, you talk about the workers at DSS. And I'll tell you that I know that talking to many of them, I'm sure many of them are not happy that you're leaving because they finally got a lot of respect from you that they have never gotten in the past. And I know it is probably one of the toughest departments to work in because you do -- every day you're seeing people who are in the worse conditions and it is not an easy place to work, but we

appreciate what they do. And I know that they'll miss you also. So again, thank you. And like I said, I can't say enough thank you's for all of the support you've given me.

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

Thank you very much, Legislator Browning, and we appreciate the support you've always given the department and its workers and its programs.

LEG. BROWNING:

Thank you.

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

Legislator Krupski.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Commissioner Blass, thank you for outlining some of the challenges here that we're looking at. And it is kind of -- it's uncomfortable to see the disconnect between the County and the State here on these issues because there seems like there's no communication, and addressing these needs as just straight budget cuts, which are going to leave the County obviously, or possibly the towns, in the end holding the bag here. So thank you for that. Good luck in the future. Thank you for your kind words.

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

And, Legislator Krupski, I would want to offer to you and to Chairman Montano at the same time an opportunity to tour the facilities. We have nine buildings and many other activities that are the hotbed of pressure, but they are also the success story of the department. And I know that Legislator Gregory did this with us a few months ago -- actually last year really, and Legislator Browning did it before him. I think Legislator Montano and you, Sir, will find it a fascinating revelation. So our office will be very happy to arrange it with your respective offices in the near future.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Thank you. I will do that so I know what the challenges really are.

COMMISSIONER BLASS:

Great.

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

All right. Thank you, Commissioner, and good luck to you. And don't be afraid to keep in touch.

(APPLAUSE)

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

Okay. Let's get to the agenda.

Introductory Resolutions

Under Introductory Resolutions we have ***IR 1001-2013, Adopting Local Law No. 2013, A Local Law to Ensure the Safety of Children in Child Care Facilities (Hahn).***

This has to be tabled for a public hearing.

LEG. BROWNING:

Motion to table.

VICE CHAIR GREGORY:

Motion to table by Legislator Browning. I will second the motion. All in favor? Opposed?

Abstentions? ***(Vote: 3-0-0-2 Not Present: Legislators Montano and Barraga)***

That is all that we have on the agenda. We stand adjourned. Thank you.

(THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 10:57 A.M.)