

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 April 21, 2015.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Leg. Monica Martinez, Chairperson
Leg. Kate M. Browning, Vice Chair (excused absence)
Leg. Lou D'Amaro
Leg. Leslie Kennedy
Leg. Robert Trotta

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Tim Laube, Clerk/Suffolk County Legislature
Jill Moss, Budget Review Office
Andrew Tarantowicz, Budget Review Office
Rick Brand, Newsday
John O'Neill, Commissioner/Department of Social Services
Lisa Pinkard, Aide to Leg. Martinez
Justin Littell, Aide to Leg. D'Amaro
William Shilling, Aide to Leg. Calarco
Michael Haynes, LI Cares, Inc/The Harry Chapin Food Bank
And all other interested parties

MINUTES TAKEN BY:

Diana Flesher, Court Stenographer

THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 1:08 PM

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Good afternoon and welcome to today's Human Services Committee. If you could all please rise for the Pledge of Allegiance to be led by Legislator Trotta.

SALUTATION

Please be seated. For the record, can you please put down that Legislator Browning has an excused absence.

I would also like to welcome our newest member to the Committee, Legislator Leslie Kennedy. Welcome. And to continue on today's agenda, we do not have any correspondence that we have received in the office. Clerk, do we have any --

MR. LAUBE:

No cards.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

No cards. Anybody from the audience who would like to address the Committee? For the record, no one in the audience would like to speak before the Committee.

PRESENTATIONS

And continuing with the agenda, today we have a presentation by Michael Haynes, Long Island Cares Incorporated. But before we do that, Michael, if you do not mind, we do have the Commissioner here. Commissioner O'Neill, is there anything that you would like to present before the Committee?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:

No, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Please note the Commissioner does not have anything to say to the Committee today. I just want to say, Commissioner, thank you for -- you know, always what you do.

So without further adieu, Michael Haynes please come forward.

Good afternoon. Yes, Michael. We have here today, as I said before, Michael Haynes from the Long Island Cares Incorporated, the Harry Chapin Food Bank. And Michael's going to present to us today what has been taking place with the Long Island Cares and what they are thinking of doing in the future as well.

MR. HAYNES:

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to address members of the Human Services -- okay. Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to address members of the Human Services Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature. Long Island Cares is proud to serve as the recognized food bank for the Long Island region at both the USDA and the New York State Department of Health. As such, we are entrusted to provide emergency food to feed our neighbors in need by successfully administrating the Emergency Food Assistance Program, TEFAP, on behalf of the Federal government and the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program, HPNAP, on behalf of the State through our own array of direct service initiatives and our dedicated distribution network of over 590 member agencies ranging from soup kitchens and food pantries to senior and daycare centers. We also are extremely fortunate to share a strong partnership with Suffolk County in that we are contractually responsible for purchasing the food and supplies on behalf of the Department of Social Services.

4/21/2015 Human Services Committee

We're here to update you on the status of childhood hunger in Suffolk County in 2015 and to apprise you of our efforts to rid the County of this societal ill. More than that, we are here to stress our greater availability to partner with the County to ensure that no child in our great County ever goes to sleep hungry.

According to Feeding America's most recent Map the Meal Gap figures, Suffolk County is home to 355,483 thousand (sic) persons under the age of 18 with a food insecurity rate of 14.8 percent, which means that there are currently 52,610 children in Suffolk County that do not know where their next meal is coming from. In the Human Services world there are so many problems we fight with no end in sight, but together we can feed 52,610 children. We can end childhood hunger in our County and we can end it relatively soon.

Realizing the growing severity of this issue, Long Island Cares has proactively implemented various programs and initiatives including the creation of neighborhood satellite locations. At our South Shore Service Center located in Lindenhurst, we've served 511 children thus far in 2015. Furthermore since this location's inception in March 2013, the site has served 3,753 children in just two years. As we continue our myriad of outreach efforts, our numbers sadly will continue to increase. As you are all too well aware, the economy is recovering slower on Long Island than elsewhere in the nation.

A mobile school pantry: A very generous foundation grant helped us to establish the region's first mobile school pantry in partnership with the Brentwood School District. The Mobile School Pantry Program works to alleviate child hunger through the provision of food to children and families at each of the district's elementary schools. Thus far this academic year we have supported Long Island's largest school district with 82,715 pounds of food to 8,415 individuals comprising 1690 families.

Kids Cafes: Established in 2002 Long Island Cares Kids Cafe Program provides nutritious meals and snacks to children who have no safe after-school environment. At a Kids Cafe, under the supervision of trustworthy staff, a child can do homework, get involved in other educational/recreational activities and enjoy a healthy meal. Through our Kids Cafe programs, we're able to feed 826 Suffolk County students each day in districts ranging from Shinnecock to Wyandanch. In March we were able to provide these 826 food insecure children with 10,274 meals. We also have multiple sites with program applications in progress so this program will continue to grow.

We also operate a Pack It Up For Kids Program, which alleviates children's hunger on the weekends when school is not in session. For many children, their free or reduced price school breakfast and lunches are their only guaranteed meals. Pack It Up For Kids provides non-perishable, easy-to-prepare nutritious food for these children on weekends and during school vacation periods by discreetly providing each child with a pack containing six meals and two snacks. Examples of items included are individual containers of juice, fruits, vegetables, shelf-stable milk, tuna and small microwavable items. To date in 2015 we provided 2295 bags to 336 Suffolk County children in districts ranging from Montauk to Amityville. This equates to 13,770 meals and 4,590 snacks.

Kids United Against Hunger: Kids United Against Hunger is a Long Island Care's project in conjunction with the United Way of Long Island that helps teach kids about hunger and provides them with the opportunity to volunteer at our food bank in Hauppauge. This three-and-a-half hour program is available to students in grades 3 through 8 one Saturday each month. Each session contains an orientation, a Hunger 101 workshop and a community service project such as group food sorting activity.

Development of a Mascot: One way in which we engage the children is by becoming the first food bank in the nation to possess an official mascot. Aspara-Gus, the friendly dragon, has been developed to help us promote our Child Nutrition Services at various community and special events. The mascot adds a new dimension to our work with children and encourages them to think about

healthy eating and help their classmates who might be less fortunate.

It's not enough to simply feed children in need. We must mobilize the key stakeholders in the fight against children's hunger. In addition to governmental entities like this committee, that also includes business and civic leaders, but most importantly we need to engage the children themselves. That's why in addition to the direct provision of food, we created a mascot and program such as Kids United Against Hunger that raise awareness. In the spirit we've partnered with Tom Chapin and Friends, the NYCB Theatre in Westbury and Long Island schools for the past three years to have our annual concert for children's hunger awareness. This year 1,069 children from Suffolk County attended. Realize, this is not just a concert. The teachers incorporate service, nutrition and hunger into their curriculum in the weeks leading up to the concert. This type of partnership between the food bank, the schools, celebrities and business embodies the model of collaboration we need to end childhood hunger.

As the regional food bank for Long Island, we're enlisting your help. Please join us in this worthy endeavor. This complex issue requires a multitude of cost-effective and sustainable solutions. Whether it is as a provider of direct services, a convener to our member agencies or other coalitions we serve, a legislative advocate or mobilizing our vast network of over 4,000 volunteers, we are perpetually here to help. The good news is that Suffolk County has a County Executive, a Legislature and Town officials that understand the severity of this issue and that there are government and foundation resources available for support that we need to explore. We hope that this testimony initiates this much needed conversation and that in the very near future we will be meeting and developing innovating programs to permanently eliminate childhood hunger in Suffolk County. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Thank you. Are there any questions from Legislators? I just have -- I just have a couple of comments. One, the school pantry at the Brentwood School District, I think, is amazing and I do appreciate you partnering up with them. And I think they're definitely taking advantage of the pantry so I do thank you for that.

Also, we did have our Women's Health Forum, our second annual in the district. And Long Island Care has provided bagged food for about 25 families that came to the Health Forum. So, again, I appreciate that and thank you for those efforts. And just knowing that you're out there day in and day out looking for people who are in need is admirable and very much appreciated. But I know you had also -- and Aspara-Gus. I like Aspara-Gus. He's been around. (Laughter)

But I know you had said, sorry, that we need to end childhood hunger in our County. And we need to do it relatively soon. And I know there's certain resources that we still need to tap into. And I look forward to knowing what those resources are that we can tap into and how we can further assist you.

I know that I have been to the warehouse and I have seen what you have. But I know there are times that you were short on certain things that are needed. So we will like to also know how we can help you.

MR. HAYNES:

Well, one way in which -- and, first, just thank you for all the kind words you said about Long Island Cares and everything we're trying to do, not just for childhood hunger but for anyone hungry in Suffolk County and Long Island as a whole. First, thank you for that.

But, you know, there's a million things we can do. And we're not -- we're not coming to you necessarily with all the answers. We know that the people in this room can come together and help us look at things from different ways that can help us find different, more sustainable solutions. But I know, you know, many of the Legislators here have done food drives for Long Island Cares. We

could create food drives specifically designed to help children, targeting foods that children like. And that's just one small idea. We can expand programs or create similar programs to the Brentwood school pantry. We can, you know -- you can identify other organizations or other key stakeholders or even corporations that we should be talking to to really help mobilize the people in Suffolk County we need to mobilize.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Okay, thank you. I do look forward to having those conversations further. Legislator D'Amaro, yes.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Hi. I'm just curious in the network or chain of distribution of getting food from a donation down to, let's say, children in need, where is the most difficult point; is it in getting the donation; is it getting access to the kids; having a facility to do it; finding out where they are and identifying them? What's the most difficult aspect of feeding children who need your assistance?

MR. HAYNES:

Not necessarily just for children, but studies have shown -- Feeding America studies have shown that we have the food to fight food insecurity. I believe we have somewhere around 120, 130 percent of the food needed to feed all the food insecure people. But it really is a community outreach issue. There's a stigma attached to hunger. There's certain communities that we're more successful getting into and there's certain populations that we're less successful getting into that -- you know, we need to enlist the community, mobilize the leaders and -- maybe not mobilize the leaders, maybe mobilize it on a grassroots level. It really is just connecting with the key people in the community. Because we get the food. We get donations. We purchase food. We get food from the State. We get food from the Federal government. And through our nearly 600 member agencies, they do a great job at getting it out.

LEG. D'AMARO:

U-hum.

MR. HAYNES:

But certain towns have more member agencies. Certain towns have less. Certain member agencies have different missions. And all our member agencies are -- are autonomous. They have their own, you know, rules. As long as they follow the rules set upon by Feeding America, the State and the Federal government, they can run their own show.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Right, that's interesting. So when you talk about this in your testimony, the hunger -- the food insecurity rate, 14.8 percent or 52,610 children that do not know where their next meal is coming from, which is a very distressing type of comment, what you're saying is through your organization, you think that there's sufficient supply. It's really the distribution network, identifying those in need. Because you have to rely on other organizations to actually make the identification of where the food goes.

MR. HAYNES:

I believe that -- with the thing with reporting children's hunger --

LEG. D'AMARO:

Let me ask it another way. Just --

MR. HAYNES:

Okay.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Just dialogue. So of these 52,610 children, how many are we effectively reaching?

MR. HAYNES:

Well, we would need school level data for that. Because the school -- the schools are actually the best. Because they have the free and reduced school -- school lunch and school breakfast program. That data I don't have the access to.

I -- I think it's -- I know how many people Long Island Cares is serving. And I know that if we reduce the stigma attached to hunger, particularly amongst the parents, we can serve more.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Okay. Okay. Alright, so -- okay, I understand that. So I would assume that your -- your work is outside the school. Because there are State programs for lower income kids that need meals through the school system.

MR. HAYNES:

We do have a seat on the Suffolk County Food Policy Council. And there are various representatives from the larger school districts in Suffolk County. And we are working with them to not only, you know, get food to kids that need it, but also to make sure the foods are the right food, the more nutritious foods. And, you know, we do sit on the Health and Welfare Council and they have an anti-hunger policy task force which does aim to fight childhood hunger. But, yeah, the largest -- the entity that knows the most about childhood hunger would be the school districts themselves.

LEG. D'AMARO:

So the school districts could be very helpful in identifying the kids that need assistance.

MR. HAYNES:

A hundred percent, yes.

LEG. D'AMARO:

And once you identify them, then you can figure out how to get -- actually make a distribution.

MR. HAYNES:

That's how the Brentwood Mobile School Pantry was created, through conversations with our administration and the Brentwood school leaders. They told us the severity of the issue. And then through foundational support, we developed the Mobile School Pantry.

LEG. D'AMARO:

So something we could do would be to go to our respective school districts and just have a conversation.

MR. HAYNES:

That would be a great first step, yes.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Maybe perhaps not giving away confidential information and all the issues involved, but just getting a sense from the administrators of those school districts whether or not there's a need for more assistance, especially when the kids are outside of school and that would be a starting point.

MR. HAYNES:

That would be a great starting point, yes.

LEG. D'AMARO:

yeah.

MR. HAYNES:

Thank you.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Thank you. Alright. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Thank you. Any other questions? Legislator Kennedy.

LEG. KENNEDY:

It's not a question.

LEG. D'AMARO:

You have to hold the button.

LEG. KENNEDY:

I'm going to have to hold it, it's broken. Okay. Okay. Hi, Michael.

MR. HAYNES:

Hello.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Our office has worked with Long Island Cares since -- a long time, ten-and-a-half years, I think, is what we've been doing. I've worked with Michael. Suffolk County gives money to a lot of organizations. Long Island Cares is probably the epitome of a successful partnership. Long Island Cares searches out to find out problems. It spends its money well. It doesn't waste. It uses the resources, not only financial resources but the physical resources of humans who are willing to volunteer time. And there are a lot.

What I think legislative offices can do is some of what we've been doing for a long time. We partner with Long Island Cares at our concerts. We partner with Long Island Cares at our blood drives. We have a bucket in our office at all times and periodically will put up advertisements for donations.

I admire -- I see two programs that I didn't know about for the children in here. That's great. And I admire what you and Long Island Cares does. Keep it up. And I'll go to my school districts and ask around to see what we can do to get the children fed. Thank you.

MR. HAYNES:

Thank you. I really appreciate it.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Thank you. Since there are no other further questions and/or comments, there is no further business before us. This ends our Committee for today. Have a great day.

**THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 1:27 PM
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