

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 8, 2015.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

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

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

George M. Nolan, Counsel to the Legislature
Sarah Simpson, Assistant Counsel/Legislature
Jason Richberg, Clerk of the Legislature
Jill Moss, Budget Review Office
Andrew Tarantowicz
Rick Brand, Newsday
Katie Horst, County Executive's Office
John O'Neill, Commissioner/Department of Social Services
Robert Braun, County Attorney's Office
Lisa Pinkard, Aide to Leg. Martinez
Justin Littell, Aide to Leg. D'Amaro
William Shilling, Aide to Leg. Calarco
Ali Nazir, Aide to Leg. Kennedy
Michael Pitcher, Aide to Presiding Officer
And all other interested parties

MINUTES TAKEN BY:

Diana Flesher, Court Stenographer

THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 1:10 PM

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

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

SALUTATION

Thank you. Please be seated. Okay, we do not have any correspondence. Mr. Clerk, are there any cards?

MR. RICHBERG:

No cards, Madam Chair.

TABLED RESOLUTIONS

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Thank you. There is -- let me see, hold on. Okay, so no public portion, no presentations. We will continue to Tabled Resolutions, which is **1768, Establishing the Suffolk County Child Care Commission. (Martinez)**. I will like to make a motion to table.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Second.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Second by Legislator D'Amaro. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? Motion carries. **(VOTE: 5-0-0-0)**

INTRODUCTORY RESOLUTIONS

Introductory Resolutions, 1944, Authorizing a services contract and lease for Shelter for Homeless Families with H.E.L.P. Suffolk, Inc. (Co. Exec.)

LEG. BROWNING:

Commissioner, could I ask you some questions? I think what I'll do is make -- I'll make a motion to discharge without recommendation, but I'm sure you're familiar with the Help Suffolk. I think -- when I come into office ten years ago, that facility was supposed to close. And there was a promise made to the North Bellport community that that would after ten years -- ten years ago, that it would become an affordable housing program, that it would be converted for affordable housing. And obviously as we know, because it was supposed to be - there will be no homelessness, right? And we know that's not the case.

I have reached out to the North Bellport community, to the civic groups and various members within the community to find out where they stand on this. Because a promise was made to them ten years ago. And obviously that was reneged on. Since that, it has been approved again, several times, I think, maybe twice. And I'm not prepared to support the renewal of a contract until I get a commitment -- until I find out where the community is and has -- I don't know if anybody from the County Exec's Office has reached out to anyone in the community. Okay? Which I think is unfair. To reach out to them because they -- a promise was made to them and not been kept.

There had been issues in the past. I think you're familiar with some of the issues in the past; complaints from residents in the building, in the facility. I believe a lot of those issues have been

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resolved. But, again, can you kind of give me an update on where we are and -- if we don't pass it before the end of the year, is it going to be an issue? Could we wait until the beginning of next year?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:

So, a couple of points you made. I'll try to address them in order. They seem unaware of any agreement from ten years ago. I'm sorry, I'd have to ask somebody with some history in my organization or County Exec's organization as well if they're aware of that.

Secondly, obviously, I'm Department of Social Services. I don't have the responsibilities or wherewithal, if you will, about -- to set up, you know, affordable housing at that location. I'd have to defer to the appropriate county department, Real Estate, for that specific piece of it.

As far as the actual contract we need -- by Social Services Regulations we need to provide services to homeless families. So, the fact is we will provide those services with or without the contract. We'd prefer to have a contract in place because it protects the County from a legal perspective. So I think it's important that we pass this resolution.

Having said that, I understand your position. I thank you for articulating your concerns. Having said all of that, the reality is is that even if there was some agreement in place, you know, looking out to the future, we still need to provide homeless services now to those families. So I'm going to continue to provide the services because that's what Social Services Regulations tell me to do.

LEG. BROWNING:

Right. And we respect that. And, again, I understand we do have a problem with homelessness. I know that that was when Help Suffolk was first put in place, the comments back then was "well, you know, we'll have it open, we'll get these people back on track and there'll be no homelessness." And, you know, it is a minority community that has continually felt like they've been dumped on. And out of fairness to them, and, again, it kind of bothers me that no one from the administration even reached out to Help Suffolk and to the local churches, community groups to find out what their position is and where they stand. They're a very caring community. I can guess that many of them are probably supportive, but I think the fact that there's been no communication with them at all, to get an opinion or how they feel about this is, I think, a little unfair to them.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:

I've noted that concern and obviously I will follow up with the Administration to ensure that that is passed on.

LEG. BROWNING:

So they have between now and Tuesday if we do a discharge without recommendation, and I know we have one meeting, but I would, you know -- I kind of get a feeling that come next Tuesday, it'll get passed any way, whether the community's reached out to or not. So I would expect that the Administration will reach out to the community, to the civic groups and the churches and meet with them. And, again, if there's no need to pass it before the end of the year, I'd like that they would consider holding off until the beginning of the year and take some time to meet with them.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:

Again, I'm just going to state that obviously having a contract in place is always the most preferred option. I would think Counsel, you know, legislative or county attorney counsel would agree with that statement. Not having a contract obviously is not a good thing.

LEG. BROWNING:

I think -- when does the contract exactly expire; December 31st? Is that what it says?

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CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

It says here expires in November of 2015.

LEG. BROWNING:

Okay. So, it's already expired. So what's another month? So if the Administration could reach out to me, let me know what they're planning to do -- again, I have called a couple of the local civic groups to find out where they stand because I know ten years ago there was many them had an issue with it. There were some problems with residents. I know that the ambulance company had complained at one time. There were a number of issues. And I know that they've tried to resolve a lot of the complaints.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:

Yes. My understanding is that those issues have all been resolved.

LEG. BROWNING:

Right, right. Leslie, you had mentioned that you have received some complaints also? And it's not even in her district. But I -- again, I think it's important that the community be behind it. And like you say, they're a very caring community. They understand. But I think out of respect for them, I think, they deserve some kind of communication. Okay.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:

Duly noted.

LEG. BROWNING:

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Thank you. Do you have any other questions or comments? Okay. So -- so I will second the motion to discharge without recommendation. All in favor? Opposed? Abstention? Motion carries. **(VOTE: 5-0-0-0)**

There is no further business on this agenda so this meeting is adjourned. Thank you.

**THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 1:19 PM
{ } DENOTES SPELLED PHONETICALLY**