

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
OF THE
SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE
MINUTES

A meeting of the Public Safety Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Rose Y. Carcappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, 725, Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York on July 23, 2015.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Leg. Kate M. Browning, Chairperson
Leg. Robert Calarco, Vice Chair
Leg. Kara Hahn
Leg. Leslie Kennedy
Leg. Monica Martinez
Leg. William Spencer

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

George M. Nolan, Counsel to the Legislature
Sarah Simpson, Assistant Counsel/Legislature
Jason Richberg, Chief Deputy Clerk/Legislature
John Ortiz, Budget Review Office
Andrew Tarantowicz, BRO
Michael Pitcher, Aide to Presiding Officer
Josh Slaughter, Aide to Leg. Browning
William Shilling, Aide to Leg. Calarco
Alyssa Turano, Aide to Leg. Hahn
Elizabeth Alexander, Aide to Leg. Spencer
Katie Horst, County Executive's Office
Director Edward Gialetta/Veteran's Court
Marlene Patrella
Suzanne K. McBride
Caitlin M. Chandler
Lieutenant O'Malley
And all other interested parties

MINUTES TAKEN BY:

Diana Flesher, Court Stenographer

THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 10:08 AM

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Okay, will all Legislators report to the horseshoe. Thank you. Okay. We are waiting for a couple of more but okay. Sorry. Nasty bug. If we can please stand for the Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator Martinez.

SALUTATION

And, please, we would like to stay standing for a moment of silence. It's been a tough time in our country and also in our community. We have the four women who passed away in the tragic accident in Cutchogue: Lauren Baruch, Stephanie Belli, Amy Grabina and Brittney Schulman. And also for the five servicemen killed: Sergeant Thomas Sullivan, Lance Corporal Squire Skip Wells, Staff Sergeant David Wyatt, Sergeant Carson Holmquist and Petty Officer Randall Smith. And for all of our men and women who are defending our country at home and abroad.

MOMENT OF SILENCE OBSERVED

Thank you. And I did want to mention, also, I believe today we wish Officer Nick Guarara a lot of luck. Today his attacker will be sentenced. And I'm hoping that the Judge will be fair and give a strong message that Police Officers' lives and our law enforcement members do matter. Thank you.

PRESENTATIONS

And with that, we do have a presentation. We have Edward Gialella from the Suffolk County Veterans Court. He'll do a presentation and overview on what he's -- what's currently happening at the Veterans Court. And I have to say we do want to send our condolences to Judge Toomey. One of the young women was his niece. So please send our condolences to him and his family.

So, Edward, if you would like to come forward, right next to John here. And hopefully you have a mike that you don't have to hold. But I had the opportunity to -- I visited all of the specialty courts and I have to say very impressive. The last one I went to was the DWI Court, but I went to Veterans Court. And what was nice about it was that Judge Toomey is a veteran himself, so he understands it. And we had some wonderful veterans who were there working as mentors, volunteering as mentors. And so funny what happened when I was at the Court, happened to be two young men that I knew myself who were veterans in my district who were in the Court.

So, Ed, if you'd like to go ahead and start and give us an update.

MR. GIALETTA:

Thank you very much. I'd like to say thank you for having me this morning. It means a lot to me to be able to come out and talk a little bit about what the Court system is doing and what I'm doing. I do always invite anyone that would like to come and see the Court. It is an open forum, with any of our specialized parts, whether it is Veterans Court. Today so happens -- we have a Mental Health Court today. We have a Criminal Drug Court three days a week. We have a Human Trafficking Court. We have a Felony Drug Court in Riverhead. We have a Family Treatment Court. We have a Judicial Diversion Court in Riverhead. And we have two Eastern Town Drug Courts in Southampton and Riverhead. So we are very specialized in -- I think I'll start out by just talking about what that means.

When I say specialized part in Drug Court or Veterans Court, it's sometimes hard to understand if you're not familiar with the criminal justice system what that actually entails. And just briefly I'll just let everyone know that -- what a specialized part is, is providing services for offenders that have

special needs. And in the case of the veterans, those needs are substance abuse and mental health and treatment. And the important aspect of that, it's not just providing those services, but it's providing effective services quickly and monitoring them very closely.

Before any of the specialized parts were here, which -- our first Drug Court was in 1996. And prior to that there was still substance abuse and there was still, you know, people not working. And there was still a lot of mental health and, you know, just saturating the court system. And before the specialized movement, no one -- none of these issues were being addressed properly. People had good intentions. Attorneys, defendants, judges but there was really no mechanism to make sure that if someone did have an issue and wanted to address it, that it was going to be taken care of. So what specialized parts did, is that we held people very accountable for their crimes. And if they did, in fact, need some services and needed some help, we were able to put a team together to get that done.

In respect to our Veterans Court, it was a movement that started back in 2008 in Buffalo with a judge by the name of Judge Robert Russell, who is a pioneer in the drug treatment court field. He was one of the first, I would say, the third drug court in New York State, Buffalo; spearheaded it, took it on himself back in the mid-'90s. And in 2008 he decided seeing that the population of veterans before him, decided to do everything that he did in the drug courts to really put that into the veteran court model.

So what he did is he, he was able to put together a steering committee, which, you know, counted on, you know, the Legal Aid Society, the DA's Office, the Sheriff's Department, you know, all of the court system and sat everyone down at a table and said "let's do something different, as we have helped our substance abusers and our mental health courts, let's do something for our veterans. It's far too long. We have a tremendous population here in New York State."

And being a Judge, and as you know you can get a lot of things done being Judge, he was able to do that. He put a team together. There were no additional resources, you know. I get that question all the time, "well, how much does this cost? You know, what kind of staffing do you have?" There was no additional staffing. We know all the resources. We have the project directors or resource coordinators that are already working in the court system. We have already judges. And what he decided to do was just those cases that have -- that are veterans that are in the court system, just to divert them to his part. And wouldn't you know he was very successful. As all of the treatment courts are, they are successful for many reasons, one of which is the continued monitoring, the close supervision which could sometimes be weekly updates for treatment. If there are any issues or problems they're addressed immediately. And it was very successful in Buffalo.

Soon thereafter other places caught on, Suffolk County being one of them. And in 2010 we put a steering committee together ourselves. I was a part of that. Judge Toomey was on board from the beginning. The court system, the Northport VA we're fortunate here in Suffolk County to have a VA right here in our backyard, which provides us with all of our services that we need. And we sat down. And for several months we really tried to work out what would happen to those case -- what type of cases we would take in; what would be the dispositions for certain cases; who would the staffing be in the part; what days would we operate.

And we were able to arrange a weekly -- I'm sorry -- biweekly court appearances. The staffing, like I said, there was no additional resources. I'm already working for the court system in other capacities so it was just a dedicated morning for me. And we were fortunate to have the Northport VA dedicate one of their social workers, a man by the name of {Eric Bruno}, who is the case manager/social worker for all of our veterans. And we made it happen. We had gone out to the Bar Association and did a lot of presentations to really get the word out there. Because it's great to have it, but if no one knows about it, you're not going to get too many cases. And we spread the

word. And, you know, just talked to as many people and -- at places where we could. And cases started filtering in.

The process in a Veterans Court similar to the other courts, is that any type of case is accepted, primarily nonviolent cases. But there -- in some instances, there have been violent cases that have been accepted. They have all been cleared by the DA's office. We understand not only our veterans but our Mental Health Court caseload, there are domestic violence incidents and things of that nature. But once the District Attorney's Office investigates properly, speak to victims, see the circumstances, the case may come into to our Veteran Court.

The case would then get transferred into our court. Upon transferring the case and the approval from the DA's office, we do a full assessment on that individual, really to see who they are; what their needs are; what their trauma is; their substance abuse history; are they receiving benefits; is there a holdup with them receiving their benefits? And we do a full assessment. And shortly thereafter we have them enter into the court. And entering the Veterans Court, they must take a plea. They plead guilty. And as most of our courts do, we postpone sentence for 12 to 18 months.

So essentially they're on the hook. You know, in most cases a plea and sentence sometimes happen within the same day; or, you know, relatively a short period of time. What the specialized parts do is we postpone that sentencing. And we say that in the interim, they must be compliant. They must attend treatment; they must stay clean; they must go to work; they must do all of the things that they had said they want to do and that they should do. And we supervise them. We help them. They relapse, they get arrested again, everything is a case by case basis. So if someone does relapse, it does not mean that they all get sentenced unsuccessfully.

Even if they have gotten arrested again, it still does not mean that they will definitely get sentenced. We look at each case, each individual, what their needs are. And we'll try to get them back into treatment, most often an increased level of treatment. So we may start out someone in, you know, outpatient services. And if they continue to use drugs and alcohol, it could increase to, you know, short-term or even long-term or sober house or things like that. And they're coming to court weekly -- I'm sorry -- biweekly, updating the judge. Judge Toomey is fantastic, you know, the encouragement, the support that he'll give out to our vets; and also the admonishment if they're not doing well, if they're missing appointments, if they're drinking.

We had a young man a few weeks ago come to court intoxicated. He was, you know, he had drank through the night. He wasn't remanded. We had the mentors there. Judge Toomey spoke to him. He was taken right from our courtroom into an inpatient facility. It's a different type of atmosphere. And, again, if they're not doing what they're supposed to do, there are sanctions such as remands; or ultimately they can fail and be sentenced. Their plea, what they've said at that plea, they sign a contract. The plea will -- that contract will have in it what they will get if their successful. Most often the charges would be reduced or even dismissed. Felonies would be reduced to misdemeanors. And often misdemeanors may be reduced to violations. If they're unsuccessful, then the conviction remains. They've already pled guilty and they would be sentenced a pre-determinant amount of time in jail, which can be anywhere from three months to nine months to sometimes state prison.

Right now we currently have about 40 participants in our court. We've graduated in the low 50s in the time that we've been here and working. And we've had about 150 vets come through our system. Are there more? Absolutely. There are a lot more, but for different reasons, whether they are not interested in coming into the court, their attorney may not be interested; or sometimes their crimes will, you know, preclude them from being allowed to enter into the court. Some people are not interested in the help and it seems hard to believe that, but some would rather just do some jail time and be done with it or get on probation because Veterans Court, as well as all the other

treatment courts, is difficult. It's a commitment. It's coming to court on a regular basis. It's attending treatment consistently. It's doing well in treatment. It's going back to school. It's getting a job. So it's very intense. And some people tend to not come into the court. It doesn't mean that they can't come in at a later date. I've had defendants choose not to; and for whatever reason continue drug use or a new arrest. They have changed their mind and they've come in.

We have our graduations. I think there's a few people here that have been to some of our graduations. We have our Veterans Court graduation once a year. And we have all of our vets that have completed successfully and the charges have been reduced or dismissed. Come back for a ceremony that we have them speak, we give them certificates.

One thing I did mention earlier is our mentors. I know they're being honored next week. We have a mentor which is -- mentor program which is, from what I understand, one, if not, the best in New York State. Mentors, really, if you're familiar with AA or NA or something like that, or a sponsor, it's essentially what it is. It's having someone that was in the same branch of the military as our participant, who can talk to them outside of the courtroom, who can talk to them in the courtroom but has a relationship outside the court and can counsel them in different ways.

We had an example yesterday, a young man had lost his car. His car had just broken down. And they were getting him another car; through their connections were able to secure a vehicle for him, allowing him to get to court and work and treatment. We have a lot our mentors helping people get employment. You know, our mentors, you know, a retired police officer, we have, you know, just -- businessmen, an array of men and women that have been with us since the beginning. Before we had any of our participants, we had 15 mentors. We had them sitting in our courtroom waiting. And they are in our courtroom religiously looking to help.

Their role, again, is not punitive. It's not to, you know, reveal any information that they've obtained through, you know, the relationship with the participant. But it's there for -- a friend. It's there to kind of help them through some of the situations that sometimes the court can't relate to. And it's been very successful. Our mentors have been studied throughout the State. It's unfortunate in some other places they don't have that. Our mentors are from the Vietnam area. And like I said, they are there religiously and are a great asset to what we do. So, it's great to see them being honored next week. I'm proud of that.

Are there questions? Should I wait for questions or --

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Well, yeah, I can open it up for questions. Anyone have any questions? No.

MR. GIALELLA:

No? Okay.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Leslie.

LEG. KENNEDY:

I don't want to ask a question. I want to make a statement. Judge Toomey, the Veterans Court, Drug Treatment Court, the best. I worked with him in outpatient rehab centers. I've worked with him inpatient in hospitals. I cannot think of a bad thing to say. So we're very pleased to have you. Keep up the good work.

MR. GIALETTA:

Thank you. You know, talking about, you know, the Northport VA is fantastic having it in our backyard. They have an array of services of whatever we need. And what I found out in recent years is we're able to tap into other places. You know, having that Northport, the VA connection here, if there is a program in Virginia or there's a program Upstate or there's another VA that has a specialized program for a short-term PTSD Vietnam -- you know, they would -- we would -- we're able to place them there. And, you know, if you're -- you know, have any experience with insurance companies, which most us do, and especially with treatment, it can get convoluted and difficult.

And, you know, Northport is not that way. Services are immediately. You show up there today or tomorrow, you'll see someone. We'll access treatment quickly. It's fantastic. From someone that -- myself, who's been around doing this with working about who has Medicaid, who's pending, the insurance company will only pay for 12 days of inpatient, there's no such problem with working with the VA. And it's a great, great way to work. It's -- it's -- they're assessed what their needs are. They are placed. And like I said, they can go anywhere. We have had people in Cincinnati; we've had people up in Boston; we got people in Virginia, Upstate New York for a specialized program. And it's really, really fantastic.

If people are in those places, they're not required to come to court. You know, it would be pretty difficult for someone located in Cincinnati to come to court every two weeks. So they'll stay there. And we'll just get updates to make sure they're doing the right thing and they're staying clean, what their plan is. But we discuss it as a team.

When we sit down, Judge Toomey, myself, the social worker from Northport, our ADA, all discuss the cases. We go over them. We go over the outcomes, their progress. We're also as a county very fortunate to have District Attorney's Office that is supportive of specialized parts. Mr. Spota is a veteran himself and he really spearheaded this. You know, if it wasn't for the support of the DA's Office, none of the specialized parts would be going. Because they all need the approval from the DA's Office. So having the DA's office believe in it, allow some cases to come in that probably, you know, otherwise maybe wouldn't, because of the nature of the case, is very important. Because I know firsthand there's other jurisdictions, other counties that are close by that do not -- or are not able to get those cases that are needed. And they suffer. Veterans suffer; some of the defendants suffer for that. So it's -- I'm proud to be a part of that.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Okay. I guess there are no more questions. We appreciate you coming in to give everybody an update on what's going on. Like I -- again, when I sat there and watched what the Judge did and all the veterans that sat there, and you can see them as soon as a veteran walked in, one of them got up -- which one -- you know, no, "he's mine", "she's mine."

MR. GIALETTA:

Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

And it's men and women.

MR. GIALETTA:

Yes.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

That's the one thing that I noticed that, not only are the mentors, they're men and women, but also some of the veterans --

MR. GIALETTA:

Yes.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

-- are women. And, you know, I guess, you know, again, the Sheriff has been working for ten years to reduce the size of the jail, which is a hefty cost to the taxpayer. And the programs that he's created have been phenomenal. And it's great now that we're starting to see a lot more alternatives to incarceration because, you know, putting our veterans in jail certainly doesn't serve anybody any good.

MR. GIALETTA:

Right.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

And, you know, I have to say I was -- I was very impressed. And I hope that goes on for a longtime. And actually a couple of weeks ago, I don't know if you ever watched, there's a show on Sunday morning, they actually did the segment on that, on the Veterans Court. It was in another state. But, again, my husband calls me and he says, "hey, did you see this?" And I said "we have it. We're doing it."

MR. GIALETTA:

Yes.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

So he was impressed. And I think the average public don't know.

MR. GIALETTA:

They don't.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

So the more we can get that message out, the better.

(Coughing) I think it's the weather here. But, you know, the more we can get that message out for our veterans -- and I'll tell you the young -- one of the young men that came in the day I was there, I had no idea he was showing up, he didn't know I was going to be there. And the day that I met him, and my office met him, too, and we were all -- as soon as we met him, we said "there's something not right here. He's got a problem."

MR. GIALETTA:

Yes.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

And then he wound up in the court. So, you know, I'm glad that there was somewhere for him to go rather than being arrested and sent to jail. So, anyway, well, we appreciate it.

MR. GIALETTA:

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

And we look forward. And, again, we extend our invitation to the Judge for next Tuesday and yourself.

MR. GIALETTA:

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

If you can. But I understand under the current circumstances, it may not be possible for him. But, again, thank you for everything and --

MR. GIALETTA:

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

You know, we'll make sure. I know that all these Legislators know -- that to make sure that every Legislator is aware of the service that you provide.

MR. GIALETTA:

Thank you. Thanks again for having me.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Thank you.

MR. GIALETTA:

If I can just leave some of these, if you take -- (referring to pamphlets)

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

That would be great, yes. Josh, there's -- the fliers he's got.

PUBLIC PORTION

Thank you, Ed. And we have one card. Marlene, I do apologize. I didn't -- your card was sitting on top of my yellow folder. So, it kind of disappeared on me. So, Marlene Patrella.

MS. PATRELLA:

Good morning. My name is Marlene Patrella. Everything that I am saying is upon information and belief. It has been reported in Newsday in December 2013 that the Public Safety Committee, part of the Suffolk County Legislature, has not had a meeting to address public police misconduct since 2007. It has been called to my attention that certain members of the Suffolk County Legislature have received large amounts of campaign funds from one or more police unions. It also has come to my attention that in 2011, 42 members of the Suffolk County Police Department made more than \$13 million combined.

In the papers that you all have in front of you, which is public knowledge, it says that the public safety part of the Suffolk County committee shall quote have jurisdiction over matters pertaining to the police. County Executive Steve Bellone has signed a 27-page agreement with the DOJ to rein in the police department. The DOJ doesn't make County sign agreements unless the County was under their radar.

According to the agreement, there is supposed to be a community liaison for each of the seven precincts. None of the three Legislators that I have been in contact with in 2014 to the present has told me that. I was having trouble making complaints and they knew it. This is in the 27-page agreement that you all have.

I have made it clear that I am a disabled citizen every time I speak. The Suffolk County Police Department rules and regulations are not being followed when it comes to this class of people. I can testify to that. Why, after Steve Bellone signed this agreement, did Sergeant Green allegedly stop many Latinos and take money from them? Has this Committee ever addressed the subject? How about my ongoing plight? Did any meeting in Public Safety discuss this? If none of you have done this, nothing after the DOJ came down to monitor Suffolk County Police Department, then this amounts to deliberate indifference on your part. Then the 27-page justice report that Steve Bellone signed isn't worth the paper it was written on.

Since none of you in the previous years are continuing today have even made an effort to help me with my concerns, I have sent packages of this and all -- and more to certain elected appointed officials. In the Daily News and Newsday 19 cops were caught downgrading reports. I am alleging that I have at least three reports that were downgraded. I'm asking you to call for an investigation on my reports with Commissioner Weber. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Okay, Marlene. I appreciate you giving us this information. And Lieutenant O'Malley is here. I have reached out to the police department specifically to your issues. Now there was some -- I'm assuming that you -- at the end you did mention that you have specific issues that you need to have addressed. I am happy to speak with Lieutenant O'Malley and reach out to Commissioner Weber and Chief Burke to address your questions and concerns. I don't know if there's going to be some things that you might think need to be done a certain way.

As far as DOJ is concerned, and when you mentioned about Police Officer Green -- Sergeant Green, clearly what was done, what he did is being handled. So he's not getting off easy. He has been arrested. He has been charged. And the law will -- will do what the law has to do. So I don't think that he's gotten away with anything.

MS. PATRELLA:

There are ones that have gotten away with it.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Okay. And that would be --

MS. PATRELLA:

They have gotten away with it.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Okay. You need to speak on the mike. But what I'm saying is, is that I will ask Lieutenant O'Malley, sorry, drawing a blank on you, Matt, to take that information back. And I think that we could sit down and go over what your complaints are. And maybe there needs to be some clarification and a better understanding. If you feel that they haven't done the right thing, maybe they can better explain to you why certain things can or cannot be done. Okay. Thank you.

MS. PATRELLA:

Do I go to him now?

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

We can get your information. I actually have your information here.

MS. PATRELLA:

Okay.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

I believe you gave us your phone number.

MS. PATRELLA:

I can go?

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Yes. And I will make sure that he has your information. Okay. Thank you.

MS. PATRELLA:

Thanks so much.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Okay, we have no more cards. Is there anyone else in the room who would like to speak? I see we have some 911 operators in the room. Welcome. I'm hoping that -- I got a feeling that things are not going so well when I see you in the room. So I guess we will have a conversation. I guess you don't want to come to the mike. I guess we'll talk the staffing levels, I'm assuming, is still an issue. Okay. I don't know that there's anybody here. Do you have any questions, Kara? Well, Lieutenant O'Malley's here, but I don't know that he's going to necessarily be able to respond to the questions, but if you have any requests you want to make?

LEG. HAHN:

So now that I have to speak into the microphone right now -- sorry. If there's any kind of update, I mean, we're certainly hearing that there's still an ongoing problem there. And we did something. Didn't we actually act as a Legislature? We did something that made them tell us what to report --

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Yes, we did. George?

MR. NOLAN:

Yeah, I think we passed a resolution that if the vacancies in those positions exceeds 10%, then they have to apprise us of that; the Police Department has to apprise us of that and describe a plan of how they're going to deal with that -- with those vacancies and provide the service.

LEG. HAHN:

So does that cover both emergency complaint operators as well as dispatchers, as well as all the other positions?

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Actually I just recently expanded it for the FRES dispatchers.

LEG. HAHN:

Great job, Kate; you're on top of everything.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Yeah, we passed it in --

LEG. HAHN:

But maybe 10% is too large of a number.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

I don't think ten percent's unreasonable.

LEG. HAHN:

Well, I'm saying if we're still having a problem -- and they haven't reported back to us -- so doesn't it require that -- I'm sorry.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Okay, I guess --

LEG. HAHN:

It requires that they --

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Lieutenant O'Malley, if you could come forward and -- I think she's making a request. So what's your request, Kara?

LEG. HAHN:

Have you let us know yet that there's more than 10% vacancy?

LT. O'MALLEY:

Legislator Hahn, all I can say is I don't have that information at this time. I know obviously we value the 911 operator dispatchers just like everyone else. We're aware of the problem and I'm sure it's being worked on.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

We actually -- I do remember, but it was quite some time ago, where we did receive information. But it's been quite some time since we've actually received any new information. So I would hope that the AME members could apprise us of that information and if they are aware if there's more than 10%.

LEG. HAHN:

Okay, so we were notified that there was a 10% -- that they were at that 10% threshold.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Yep.

LEG. HAHN:

And so all the law does is tell them to notify us and they don't have to act.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Well --

MR. NOLAN:

The resolution stated that they had to describe to us how they were going to provide the services and respond to the calls with those vacancies in place.

LEG. HAHN:

So -- to add to your list, do -- can you please tell us next time or before next time, because I think we have a little bit of a break here, so as soon as possible, the number of vacancies and have you -- since that notification, have there been any SCINS signed; have there been any new positions filled or are they in training or are they -- you know, what's going on. You know, if this -- if they law's not adequate and -- if we must -- remember we were talking about automatic back fills? And I know it's complicated with training, but if -- you know, if we're still experiencing these kinds of problems that often cause me to curse on the record, you know, we're going -- I don't know what to do anymore. This is frustrating for us as a committee if we keep hearing problems about the

operators who were -- you know, it's a very stressful -- very incredibly stressful job. And they have to be -- we're coming into hurricane season; you know, summertime is really busy. And I feel like it's always really busy for you guys. But, anyway, so if can take that back and report back to us with all due haste.

LT. O'MALLEY:

Absolutely. I'll definitely have people start looking into it when I get back.

LEG. HAHN:

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

And there is no one here from FRES, or is there anyone from FRES today? No, not today. But, you know, and, again, I know that they were filling positions in FRES. And I think there was going to be a few more retirements than they expected this year. So while they tried to fill those spots, it really -- it's not giving them a plus. It's kind of -- they're still in the negative. Suzanne, if you could -- obviously you're living a day-to-day. And I know that there's disability issues that people have retired and -- so probably all the new people that you had come in has probably put you back to where you started.

MS. McBRIDE:

We're actually lower than where we started when I came here in 2012. Unfortunately, a lot of it is unforeseen and sudden. We do have three new 911 operators starting, I believe, on the 27th.

Part of the problem, you mentioned the resolution for the 10%. I think part of the problem there seems to be some misunderstanding and maybe we need to get clarification between the Legislators and the Department. Whether that 10% is 10% under the actual budgeted numbers in the County budget or an internal budgeted number, which is completely different, according to the department's numbers we're only maybe one, two percent below. According to the County budget, we're nearly 25% below.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Oh.

MS. McBRIDGE:

So there's a discrepancy there. I'm not sure how that arose. Don't know where the numbers came from, but that seems to be the problem as far as notification to the Legislators and to why we are where we are. We did have -- unfortunately quite a few people have taken ill and a few people have left suddenly because of the pressure, the nature of the job. It's unfortunately that pretty soon it's going to become more attractive to become a fast food worker than a 911 operator. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Now, with the people who trained not too long ago, did all of them stay?

MS. McBRIDE:

Not all of them, no. We did lose a few, but a good portion of them stayed. I don't have the numbers in front of me so I won't quote any numbers.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Well, did they replace those people? If they didn't stay, did they bring in --

MS. McBRIDE:

We have not replaced anybody probably in the past year. So, no, they have not replaced those. And we had some older employees that were kind of in between retirement and being new. And they decided that they'd had enough and they -- they left. So we're having a very difficult time keeping people, yes.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Go ahead.

LEG. HAHN:

So, this is to George. The law requires that -- I'm sorry, it's been a while since I looked at it. I'm sure it has been for you, too. Sorry. So, but it requires that we get -- the department reports to us, tells us their plan and then that's it.

MR. NOLAN:

Yeah.

LEG. HAHN:

So I guess what I'm saying is maybe there should be a monthly report until they're filled, you know, like what's happening? Did you sign a SCIN, did you train someone, did you -- you know -- you know, like a -- they can tell us once in January that they hit that 10% level and then what? You know, it's kind of like -- then they have a plan, but do they actually have to fill the plan; do they actually, you know, this is -- this is such a serious ongoing, recurring, you know, it's like groundhog day here. I don't know how to -- you know, we have to find a way to address this so that this doesn't keep happening. These poor --

MR. NOLAN:

It's a tough -- touch issue for the Legislature to address. Because, a) you know, you have the County Executive who's the -- he's the Chief Administrator, Chief Executive Officer. And then b) you have the department head who's the hiring authority. So it's very hard for us to -- from the Legislature to say to the County Executive and the hiring authority, you know, "you must do XY and Z and fill these vacancies within a certain amount of time." It's a difficult one for us to get at.

LEG. HAHN:

But we are -- we do have oversight. And when we see a problem, we -- you know, we need to be pushing them to act. This is, you know -- there's problems everywhere. There's no question about that. We're in very tough times. But this is so serious and so concerning to us. And we've made it crystal clear how we feel. And we have to keep -- we have to keep finding new ways to push on this if it's just going to keep happening. You know, clearly you can't -- if you need ten, you can't operate with ten, because if you lose one, you're in trouble. And so there has to be -- there has to be some cushion there for them clearly. It's not good enough -- what has been done is not good enough. Things happen unexpectedly and we have to have the contingencies and these are people that need real training. And it's life and death scenarios that they deal with. And there has to be a buffer for them.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Done?

LEG. HAHN:

I'm done.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Yeah, I don't disagree. I think, you know, the average citizen, when they make a 911 call, they want to know that the minute they call, that they're not going to be put on hold. I don't know if you would know, Suzanne, how many times people have been put on hold. And some people will say "I was on hold for three minutes." And it might have been 30 seconds, but it's a lifetime --

MS. McBRIDE:

When you are calling, 33 seconds seems like a longtime depending on the situation.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Thirty seconds is a lifetime. And I hate to say it, it's a flow. It's not even just 911. You know, talking to some police officers who get those 911 calls, and then they're saying it was 45 minutes before he showed up to the home. Again, another lifetime, you know. People don't want to hear that *I had to wait 45 minutes for a police officer to show up or I got put on hold by a 911 operator*. Because, to them, their emergency at that time needs to be responded to within minutes. And, you know, hopefully, the hundred new police officers can make that difference. I don't know that it really will as far as response time. But we -- Suzanne, I appreciate you guys coming in. Because when we see the faces, then, it brings attention to it. And, you know, you need to kind of keep of us informed. I mean, we actually care. And, you know, I know that I've had the issue on my block, my neighbors making phone calls and saying "they didn't show up," or you know -- and, again, every call is prioritized.

So I really -- I do appreciate that you come in and keep us updated. And I guess we're going to have to follow-up with the administration. And Lieutenant O'Malley has got his hands full, now to go back and respond to all of these questions. And, John, do you have a comment?

MR. ORTIZ:

Based on the last position control register that we get from Audit Control, there are 160 authorized positions Public Safety Dispatchers and ECOs. Twenty-seven remain vacant or 17%.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Okay, 160 authorized. Okay. So, Katy, if you --

MS. McBRIDE:

If I could offer two points.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Yeah, go ahead.

MS. McBRIDE:

One thing that I think that would help to cut down on the hold times on 911 and even the response times to police calls is public service announcements. Educate the public when to call 911. We have a major problem where people call 911 and it's not really an emergency.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Right.

MS. McBRIDGE:

And that takes away from people who really do have an emergency.

The other thing that I would like looked into for my members would be why do we have such a high turnover rate and what can we do to fix that problem? There's a lot of things out there that we really need to do so we can keep these people. They're trained. We've spent thousands of dollars

to get them there. To keep losing them because the pay is not good enough, the stress is too high, whatever the case may be, we really need to try and address those. And, again, I thank you all very much for time. I appreciate it.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Thank you. And, again, 852 COPS is another one. Too many people are calling that. And that should be a 911 call. Right, yeah, but they still call 852 COPS thinking it's not a real emergency and then they find it, yeah, it should have been a 911 call. So it goes both ways. So -- but, again, thank you for coming. Do you want to come up? You have to come to the mike. You have to come to the mike.

LEG. HAHN:

Yeah, I had just said 852 COPS, they're answered by the same -- same operators. And then Kate was saying that sometimes people call 865 COPS when they should call 911. But, thank you.

MS. CHANDLER:

Yes, 852 COPS is answered by exactly the same people.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Exactly.

MS. CHANDLER:

So it doesn't matter which one you call.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Right.

MS. CHANDLER:

You're still going to get the same people. You're still going to get put in the same queues. It's just whether or not we answer you faster.

LEG. HAHN:

Do you still answer calls for headquarters? And there were other, like --

MS. CHANDLER:

Yes, we still answer the switchboard calls as well.

LEG. HAHN:

Switchboard calls. That's still a problem.

MS. CHANDLER:

Yes.

LEG. HAHN:

I don't -- I thought we addressed that.

MS. CHANDLER:

It's all answered by the same telephone system so it all comes to the same queue.

LEG. HAHN:

Okay. That's a problem.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Yeah.

LEG. HAHN:

Didn't we get --

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

That was supposedly changed.

LEG. HAHN:

Didn't they tell us they were supposed to change that?

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

That was -- supposedly have changed, yes.

LEG. HAHN:

Caity, do you mind coming up and -- Caity, can you take that back and find out why they're still answering switchboard calls?

MS. McBRIDE:

I can answer that question for you. They did change that. Our teletype operators were answering switchboard for the most part when staffing allowed. However, for quite a longtime, you may recall, we were having trouble getting that staffed as well. That's a police operations aide title.

We do now have three new police operations aides that are training. And for the past month while they're training, switchboard is consistently rolling over to 911. If teletype is available after that period, if they're not busy and they're able, they'll get the switchboard -- board first. If they're unavailable, it rolls back into the 911 operators. The switchboard operator, I believe, there's two allotted in the budget.

LEG. HAHN:

Can't it go to voicemail? Switchboard? Isn't switchboard just calls to offices?

MS. McBRIDE:

A lot of times the switchboard is, you know, the public asking questions; or it can even be, you know, a detective out on the road who needs information, that needs to get transferred, doesn't have the number offhand. It's a variety of calls. So, I guess they could put them on hold, but, of course, I'm sure the public wouldn't be too thrilled with that. But we do have, as I said, there are two switchboard operators in the budget. They haven't filled them in years. It would be a much cheaper solution. Right now we're actually paying overtime to answer switchboard; about five grades higher.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

And there's -- when you walk into Police Headquarters, there are a number of people who work behind that desk. It seems to me that that should be the 6000 number. That's where the call should be going. So, Caity, if you can make note of that. And we'll find out why we can't have those people answering the 852-6000 number.

Okay. And on another note I believe everyone received the calls. I had made a request about 911 calls. Not all of the information was provided, but I have been told we will get that information. I did ask for a weekly report. This is a two-month report. And I see a total number of calls of 84 over two months. So we are going to be getting information.

Because my concern is, is now the Seventh Precinct or the Marine Bureau have to respond to these calls. And, again, I don't want my community getting shortchanged and a police officer having to leave his sector to respond to the beach. So that's why I am asking for the information. And so if we can try and get it done on a more frequent basis, if weekly is really that difficult, please let me know. But it was a month ago we requested this. And I don't think it's -- it's fair that we had to wait this long to get the information.

So does anyone else have any questions about anything else? I did ask John to give us some information. We have heard about the 100 new police officers that are going to be hired. I'm hearing a rumor of September 14th possibly is the class. Does anybody have information on that? And, John, do you have any information as far as the -- that I had requested or do you want to -- Katie, do you have a date yet?

MS. HORST:

I don't, but I'll work on getting you one of those.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Okay.

MR. ORTIZ:

I forwarded the information you asked to Josh and yourself last week.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Right. Sorry, you did. (Laughter) But, again, I think it's -- we're now playing catch up. And I'm actually -- I know that there's three retirements coming up just within the next two weeks. So we're seeing a constant flow of retirements and, you know, talking to many of the police officers and -- especially in the SOA, how many retirement parties they're going to. It's like it's the summer of retirement. So that is of concern to me.

And I'm curious, I know the Sheriff's Department is here. I'd love to get an update from you guys on how your retirements are going. I'm assuming that now that they have ratified a contract, that that could possibly change a lot.

So, anyway, I guess with -- I hope I'm not forgetting something. I guarantee I am. I did ask about the issue, there was a newspaper article, another issue that, I think, would be good to kind of give us a heads-up. I get a call from Newsday and channel 12 about the grant for cameras. And I did get the information, but obviously body cameras on the police officers has been an issue. It's been out there in the press. And I hate to say that Newsday or channel 12 knows about the grant before we do. And when it's something -- I know that you apply for grants all the time, but something that significant, I did get the information that it was a DOJ recommendation, that -- and the application's going in. However, when something that significant comes up, grant applications for something like that, it would be nice for the Public Safety Committee to at least get an FYI ahead of time just to let us know.

INTRODUCTORY RESOLUTIONS

So with that we will move to the agenda. Okay, **Introductory Resolution 1536, Reappointing Dr. Alan B. Groveman as a member of the Suffolk County Vocational, Education and Extension Board. (Stern)**

LEG. SPENCER:

Motion.

CHAIRPERSON BROWNING:

Motion to approve by Legislator Spencer; second Legislator Calarco. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? It's approved. **(VOTE: 6-0-0-0)**

1544, Accepting and appropriating Federal pass-through grant funds from the New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (DHSES) in the amount of \$20,000 for "Operation Shield 2015" under the State Homeland Security Program (SHSP) to be administered by the Suffolk County Sheriff's Office in partnership with the Suffolk County Police Department, the East End Marine Task Force and various other Federal, State and local agencies, and to execute grant related agreements with 100% support. (Co. Exec.) Motion to approve by Legislator Hahn; place on the Consent Calendar. I'll second it. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? And it's approved. **(VOTE: 6-0-0-0/CONSENT CALENDAR)**

So with that, I make a motion to adjourn; second Legislator Kennedy and we are adjourned.

**THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 11:01 AM
{ } DENOTES SPELLED PHONETICALLY**