

SC 2/22/16

SENIORS AND CONSUMER PROTECTION COMMITTEE

OF THE

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

MINUTES

A meeting of the Veterans and Seniors 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 February 22, 2015.

Members Present:

Legislator Sarah Anker - Chairman
Legislator Steve Stern - Vice-Chair
Legislator Tom Cilmi
Legislator Al Krupski
Legislator Tom Muratore

Also In Attendance:

Amy Ellis - Chief Deputy Clerk
George Nolan - Counsel to the Legislature
Sarah Simpson - Assistant Counsel to the Legislature
Debbie Harris - Aide to Legislator Stern
Bennie Pernice - Budget Review Office
Katie Horst - County Executive's Office
Holly Rhodes-Teague - Director of Office for the Aging
Rick Brand - Newsday
All Other Interested Parties

Minutes Taken and Transcribed By:

Gabrielle Severs - Court Stenographer

(The meeting was called to order at 12:35 p.m.)

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

We're going to start the committee meeting, the Seniors and Consumer Protection Committee. Please rise, if you can, for the Pledge of Allegiance lead by Legislator Cilmi.

(Salutation)

Please remain standing for a moment of silent meditation and prayer as we think of those in our military protecting our freedom.

(Moment of Silence Observed)

Thank you. Okay. We do not have correspondence or cards today; however, we do have a presentation by Suffolk County's Office of the Aging Director Holly Rhodes-Teague. Welcome, Holly.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Hello. I want to pass this out. Good afternoon, everybody.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Good afternoon.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I know its been a while since I've done an actual presentation, so I figured I would let you know what our office does in case the -- and it's abbreviated version of it. I gave you the slides because I'm really lousy at doing them on the big screen, so I'm better off at printing them out for everybody. Basically, the way our office has evolved is that under the Older Americans Act, which is 50 years old, the state was designated an entity to give out Older Americans Act -- the designation for local offices of aging to receive funding, so the area agency on aging, which is what we are, we received the funding for Suffolk County, and there's 59 area agencies in New York State, so the funding that comes down by formula from the federal government and the state government comes down to us and then we are obligated to contract out most of our services.

There are some services we provide directly. We'll talk about that in a little bit. Our primary mission is to administer the federal and state and county funds and also develop a comprehensive set of services for those in the county that are over the age of 60.

The primary thing that everybody wants and what we're obligated to do is to keep people independent and in their homes for as long as possible. There's no one that I've ever talked to who says, No, I'd like to go to a nursing home. Everybody wants to stay home, and that's what we are obligated to do and we try to do to the best of our ability, so that is our primary overriding goal in our office.

We have a \$17.7 million budget, about 56 staff, and we have contracts with the towns and non-profits in Suffolk County. Of that \$17.7 million budget, about 75 percent of that is funded by other resources other than Suffolk County, so we are heavily funded. We do some of our funding from the county as in-kind, so it's not all dollars that we actually put in as well.

The demographics of Suffolk County, as most of you know are changing drastically as we speak. Between the 2000 and the 2010 census, we had a 27 percent increase in those over age 60 in our county. We have, from the 2010 census, 285,000 people over age 60, and that number is probably closer to 300,000 or more at this point since the 2010 census. We have the largest population in

New York State outside of New York City of those over age 60, and the cohort that's growing the fastest is the 85-plus population, and those are the ones who mostly have ADLs and IADLs, activities of daily living, that they need assistance with, and I know most of you, at some point or another, have had people in your office call us because you either have relatives or friends or neighbors or somebody that needs assistance with those kind of activities, and again we do try to help as best we can with that.

Just a little bit about a typical, you know, who we've served in our office. In 2014, 68 percent of those receiving long-term care services were 75 years or older, so even though we can serve 60 and older, our services really have been pinpointed to those that are older than 75, and that's because they're the ones that need the services. You know, if you're 60, you're probably still playing golf or you're working and having a great time doing something else besides needing our services. Nineteen percent of those that we served had an income at or below the 150 percent of the federal poverty level, which is defined as 17,505 for one person or \$23,595 for two. That's really low income to live in Suffolk County.

We've served 613,000 meals, home-delivered and congregate meals, and they were served to 9400 people in the county last year. 896 people received 22,000 units of case management, and 688 of those people receiving case management received 152,000 units of home care. In order to receive home care in our program, you must have case management in place. Case management, there's no cost for, and we do provide that service directly. We have the caseworkers in-house; and to receive the home care, that's got to be in place first, and home care, we do contract out with 13 agencies. One of the biggest problems we have is that there's not aides available, and that's an issue that is seen in all programs that have aide service available, that they're just not there. So there is an aide shortage, and that's typically not just in Suffolk County; that's throughout the state.

LEG. CILMI:

Holly, how do you define "units?"

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Which units?

LEG. CILMI:

Well, you say 896 people received 22,000 units of case management.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

By hours.

LEG. CILMI:

Okay. So a unit is an hour?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Yes.

LEG. CILMI:

Roughly defined? Okay.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Yeah. In the meals, it's one meal.

LEG. CILMI:

Gotcha.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

So in terms of the services that we provide directly, and, again, we don't provide a lot of them directly because we're obligated under the Older Americans Act to contract out. We do our New York Connects, and New York Connects is a program that was started by the State probably about eight years ago, and it was New York State's response to what's happening in the rest of the country that's called "Aging Disability Resource Centers," so our office is Suffolk County's New York Connects which means that we provide all the information and referral services for anybody of any age who would like to know what to do about long-term care in Suffolk County. So we have four people on phones every day. We have advocates out of the field at 50 different sites, and people come and they ask us questions about nursing homes, they ask us about home care, they ask us about meals, anything to assist people to stay in their homes. It could be younger than 60; however, what we have found is most of the calls are older than 60. Children typically have their services provided through school districts, you know, if they're in need of long-term care services, they find out the information that way, but we can assist in trying to get that information to people.

We do the information and referral, the benefits counseling. Benefits counseling, people who might be low income need information on doing food stamp applications, home energy assistance programs. We do have people in our office who could assist people in filling out those applications or at a site. We do either way. And phones, we probably get about 1,000 to 1200 calls a month in our office with people asking us for assistance. We also do case management in-house, and the case management is expanded and home services to the elderly program or the 3-E caregiver program. The 3-E caregiver program is to assist caregivers to maintain somebody at home and give them support, and that's -- we had Federal dollars come in for that, and the EISEP program is a State-funded program, and they don't have to have a caregiver in order to be in that program.

We also have the HEAP program. For those over age 60, they call our number. We're a subcontractor to the Department of Social Services. They do under 60, we do the applications for over 60 in terms of process. Contracted services, just a little bit. Nutrition programs, we contract with the 10 towns, a number of non-profits. We have residential repair. Those are contracts with the 10 towns. They do small repairs to keep people home. We look at safety issues. When we do those, we also -- each town has slightly different variation on how people get approved for that, but the work is done for no cost. The person receiving the service has to pay for supplies, so if they were getting something like grab-bars, they would pay for the grab-bar, but it would be put in by somebody at no cost. All our programs, with the exception of EISEP, do not have a cost attached to them, but we are obligated to give people the opportunity to provide a voluntary anonymous contribution, so letters may go out to people who have meals from the meal contractor saying, you know, You've received "X" amount of meals. These were, you know, the cost of them, what it would be, and give the people an opportunity, or there's a box at the nutrition sites where people can put money in if they'd like to. But all our programs are cost-free, with exception of EISEP, which is a cost-share program for the program, which means it's a sliding scale depending on their income. The bulk of the people who serve under EISEP do not have a cost-share because they're low income.

Let's see. We have the long-term care Ombudsman Program, which is for those people in nursing homes. The County gives a small portion of that. The rest of the funding comes from the state, and that's done with the -- Family Service League has that contract, and they do a great job with that. We have health insurance counseling with the retired senior volunteer program, and they helping people all the time on trying to figure out health insurance. We also do that in our office, so calls that go to the hotline that RSVP has, they handle calls that come into our office, we handle because there's no way that either of us could handle it on our own. RSVP does it strictly with volunteers. It's supposed to be a volunteer program, and they've done a great job since we've given them the contract a year and a half ago, and then our office again handles the ones that comes into our office.

We have adult daycare programs we do some funding for, telephone reassurance programs, home care, legal assistance is done through Touro. That was a contract that was done several years ago with Touro Law School, and they have really done a wonderful job with it. They use some of the students to do some of the research and help with the phones, so we get a little bit more bang for our buck going with the law school for that one. Case management, I spoke about. Home care services, the home care services are all non-medical, so we don't really provide any really the hands-on. They'll do some bathing and dressing, but they won't do any medical type of stuff. I talked about New York Connects. Last year, just so you know, for New York Connects, we had 12,749 people call our office for information and assistance, and those are the people that are on the phones, four people on phones a day to answer those calls, and I rotate our staff through to answer those calls. The calls are not quick ones. If they go past the clerical staff, they're calls that are pretty involved.

Advocacy, I talked about our case -- our advocates are out at 50 sites in the community a month, and they answer any and all questions that come to them, so they really have to be -- what is it -- Jack of all trades, master of none. I mean, they really do a great job on answering anything, and we always tell people that if they're going to be out there in the community, if they don't know the answer, take their phone number and get back to them. I never want to have somebody say I don't know. That's not really an acceptable answer to when people ask us things. It may take us a while to research it, but I would prefer that we do that than just say I don't know.

Nutrition is pretty self-explanatory. We provide meals out in the community at different sites, and then we have the home-delivered meal program. Home-delivered meal programs, there is a pretty lengthy assessment form to make sure that people are really in need of that home-delivered meal and it's not just that they don't want to go to a site. We do encourage people to go to congregate sites if they can because it's -- there's a lot of socialization there. It hooks them into services within the community where if they went to the meal site -- we've had a great partnership with the towns and the non-profits for many, many years on the nutrition programs. We will be doing another RFP this year for the nutrition sites, and while I say it's a competitive bid, the issue we have is that nobody really wants to do the program, so all I do is go like this (indicating) and hope that the ones I have still continue with the programs. People don't make money on these. It's not that a contractor is going to live large on what they get from us to do these programs, so that will be coming out at the end of the year.

Respite service for caregivers, it's a pretty small program. Case management is a prerequisite for the seven day -- we do a respite program up to seven days for somebody in an adult home or a nursing home, and there's a couple that we have contracts with, but you have to have the case management in place for that. And then there's a brief respite program, which is not hooked into the case management and that's for people for a few hours a day type of thing.

The senior adult daycare, we have contracts with three different towns. Res. repair is all 10 towns. I spoke about home energy. I think that's about it.

Does anybody have questions for me? I know I threw a lot. The program and services guide that I handed out, we print out about 10,000 of those a year. They go all over the place. I know most of the offices have them, and if you need more, just call our office so we can send them out to you, and they're pretty handy to have, you know, for people who are looking to see what we do.

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

They are very popular.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

They like to hold on to them. We also have our website, which is pretty interactive now. It's really -- I wouldn't have said that a couple of years ago. We had a pretty lousy website for a long time, but the one we have now is pretty useful for a long time, but the one we have now is pretty useful. It's got all the sites for the nutrition programs. It's got information -- we rotate on what's going on. We have our senior luncheon coming up in a couple months, so that information will start going out. We do the senior of the year thing; that goes on there. We have a lot of links, Social Security, different things; so if you ever get a chance, take a look at our website. It's pretty useful, but they also have the program and services guide there so if you ever have somebody asking, you can direct them to that if they are the computer.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

I'm looking at the website SuffolkCountyNY.gov/aging. I wonder if there's an easier -- how we can create a better --

LEG. CILMI:

I was just thinking the same thing.

LEG. CILMI:

Suffolk seniors.

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

Like a seniors -- SuffolkSeniors.org.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

I can ask to see if there's any way to do that.

LEG. CILMI:

Or do the org.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

SuffolkSeniors.org or .gov. Maybe check with IT.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Another thing that would be more useful. I agree because it's pretty daunting --

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

To remember.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Usually I tell people just go to Suffolk County and look for "aging."

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

Or Google it or something. What I've found, though, I have all the Leisures and very large senior communities, is they don't all have computers. In fact, I want to say, I think, since I've been in office for almost five years, before it was maybe 30 -- probably 25- or 30 percent five years ago. Now we're up to about 40- or 50, maybe 60 percent in some very active senior communities. But there's still a huge, large amount of people, senior population, that do not have computers. They have a phone, which is probably a flip phone or a land line, and they, basically, they write. They write letters. They're limited on transportation. Again, it's tough.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

We have found -- I'm in the office 18 years. I'm here a really long time, and when I first started, I

used to get letters from constituents or from their family members. What I have found over the last 10 years is you're getting e-mails from family members in the middle of the night because they're panic-stricken as to what to do with their loved one. You know, my mother needs, my father needs, I'm living here, they're in Suffolk, what do I do. It's these panic e-mails that come through to our office now. I rarely get a letter. It's amazing, but that's generally because it's the family members. It's not the older person themselves.

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

Right, and I have that to compliment your senior advocates. They're wonderful. They really help quite a few folks. These are the advocates that actually go into the different communities, and, like I said, many Seniors are very limited with transportation; you know, they might not be able to see, they may not have a driver's license, and it's really important that we get people going into the community, so I just want to compliment you and your office.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Thank you. But, you know, if we're not in a community and somebody needs an immediate answer, that's why we have four people on the phones a day. It's either an advocate or a caseworker that's taking those phone calls so they can at least get the ball rolling with somebody, and then if somebody tells them what their issue is and they're nearby a site when we're out there, they come and meet up with us as well.

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

So now you have two info lines.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

853-8200 is the best number, the main line. The other number is the Riverhead office. That's pretty small.

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

Okay. That's pretty easy to remember. Again, it's in these great books that are very, very appreciated by many of the seniors. Legislator Krupski has a question for you.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Uh-oh.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

No, it's an interesting question because you talk about all the programs, and you talk about some of the contracted vendors that you have, and you hope they want to continue serving the community. How would the \$15 minimum wage increase -- how is that going to effect the services that you're providing?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

I do know that most of the towns are paying at least that. I don't know about the non-profits yet. We actually have a survey we're doing right now with our contractors to ask if there's going to be any issues with that, so I'm not really sure what the fallout from that is going to be.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

That's going affect obviously -- it's going to hurt business across the board, but I was wondering how -- you know, you're providing a service at a cost today. That's just a cost that's not going to -- that's like an unfunded mandate-type cost.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Likely, the scenario I can see is that when they bid for the nutrition program, because we bid on a

unit cost, we found that when we did that -- it's got to be close to 18 years ago -- that if you're not going to get paid if you don't provide the service, they're more likely to try to increase the amount of people they serve, so we've been doing it that way, but likely if -- they may increase their cost to us and that might reduce the number of meals we have available to service because I have a finite amount of funding that we have.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Thank you.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

We're pretty heavily overmatched on the home-delivered meals because of the fact that the federal government has not kept up with the funding for that program for many years and the need's been so great, and when you talk about feeding elderly people, nobody wants to say, We can't feed you because there's no funding. So I have to say that I'm very fortunate that I've have the support from this group and from the county executive to continue the program with the same amount of meals at least.

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

And just let us know, too, though, if you need additional advocacy from our committee or from the Legislature because, you know, Long Island is very different than many different parts of the country, incredibly expensive, limited with affordable housing. The electric issues, I'm working on all electric. We've got seniors paying over \$1,000 a month and they're just deciding do they get their medication, do they get food, or do they have heat in their homes. Really. I mean this is not an exaggeration. It's what's happening here in Suffolk County, so let us know, again, if there's anything that we need to do.

I think one of the most important things that we are doing is getting the word out there about the HEAP program, which is affordable electricity, and also the food programs, so those are very important.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Thank you. Anyone else?

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

Okay, Holly. I think that's good. Thank you so much for coming down.

LEG. CILMI:

Thanks, Holly.

LEG. MURATORE:

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

Okay. We have no tabled resolutions. We will move forward with Introductory Resolutions.

IR 1112-2016, Approving the reappointment of Michael Daly as a member of the Suffolk County Electrical Licensing Board (County Executive). I would like to make a motion to approve.

LEG. CILMI:

Second.

LEG. MURATORE:

Second.

CHAIRPERSON ANKER:

We have a second. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? Motion carries. **Approved (VOTE: 5-0-0-0).**

I see no further business. This meeting is adjourned.

*(*The meeting was adjourned at 12:57 PM*)*