

**SENIORS & CONSUMER PROTECTION COMMITTEE
OF THE
SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE**

A meeting of the Seniors & Consumer Protection 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 4, 2016.

Members Present:

Legislator Sarah Anker - Chair
Legislator Tom Cilmi
Legislator Al Krupski

Not Present:

Legislator Tom Muratore - Excused Absence
Legislator Steve Stern - Excused Absence

Also in Attendance:

Amy Ellis - Deputy Clerk/Suffolk County Legislature
Sarah Simpson - Assistant Counsel to the Legislature
Benny Pernice - Budget Review Office
Alyssa Turano - Aide to Legislator Hahn
Robyn Fellrath - Aide to Legislator Anker
Catherine Stark - Aide to Legislator Krupski
Debbie Harris - Aide to Legislator Stern
Lynne Bizzarro - County Attorney's Office
Rick Brand - Newsday
All Other Interested Parties

Minutes Taken By:

Gabrielle Severs - Court Stenographer

(The meeting was called to order at 12:36 p.m.)

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Welcome to the Seniors and Consumer Protection Committee. Please rise for the Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator Cilmi.

(Salutation)

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

(Moment of Silence Observed)

I do not see correspondence for public comment cards. We will go right into our presentation. We have this morning Michelle Bates. She's the program coordinator of the Consumer Assistance Program for the Aged, Blind, and Disabled for Nassau Suffolk Hospital Council. Michelle, would you like to join us up front here? Also, is Albert here yet? No, Albert is not here yet. The Suffolk County DSS director of the ABD-FE consumer assistance program will also be presenting shortly.

I also want to put on record, Legislator Muratore and Legislator Stern have an excused absence for this committee.

Welcome. Could you introduce yourself, please?

MS. BATES:

Sure. I'm Michelle Bates. I'm the program coordinator for the Consumer Assistance Program from the Aged, Blind, and Disabled from the Nassau Suffolk Hospital Council; longest job title in the world.

MR. LACOMBE:

Mine's just as long. Albert Lacombe. I am from Suffolk County Department of Social Services, and I am the program director for the Aged, blind, and Disabled program in Suffolk and Nassau County hospital.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Welcome. So today you have a presentation? You can begin.

MS. BATES:

So as of October 1 of 2015, the New York State Department of Health recently awarded a grant to Suffolk County Department of Social Services as well as Nassau Suffolk Hospital Council as their subcontracting agency to provide application assistance for Medicaid for those that are aged, blind, and disabled, and by "aged," they mean anyone 65 years of age or older. We are currently staffing approximately 32 enrollment sessions across both both Nassau and Suffolk County, which are located in community-based organizations, libraries, et cetera, so that we're out and about in the field trying to assist this targeted population. We have, you know, three enrollers that are out there. We can apply for Medicaid for community coverage, long-term care coverage, as well as nursing home coverage, so we hope that you will refer your consumers, your clients to our program, as our services are all free, so please don't refer them to elder care attorneys that are going to charge them \$5,000 to do a Medicaid application when we can assist them for absolutely nothing.

I did provide packets to all of you, which has our calendars on one side for April, there's Nassau and Suffolk for both sides, as well as a program flyer in both English and Spanish; and then on the other side of the packet are the basic documentation that we would need to assist the client to apply, again both in English and Spanish, and my business card is included if you have any have

constituents that would like to speak with me directly and have difficult situations that they need some assistance with, we can provide one-on-one enrollment assistance to those folks.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

So I have a constituent who I saw this weekend at a fire department installation dinner, and she said, "Sarah, I was paying \$34 a month for my medication, and I just got a bill and it's \$1,000 a month. What am I going to do?"

MS. BATES:

So depending on, you know, I would need to know her exact situation, if she's on Medicare, is she just on original Medicare, does she has supplemental insurance that she's paying for; you know, we would look at her income and and see whether or not she would be able to apply for Medicaid to assist with those costs.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Yeah, I think she had mentioned a story that a pharmaceutical company is buying up the medication from other pharmaceutical companies and hiking the prices drastically. Is that true? Is that commin?

MR. LACOMBE:

I'm not positive. I have never heard of that, but that doesn't mean it's not true. But what we recommend with the Medicaid programs is because there are so many different possible ways to be eligible, especially for this population, with the spend-down, the buy-in, the working disabled, we recommend putting in an application because it can't hurt. It's a supplement insurance to the Medicare program. It's another level of coverage that they wouldn't have if they didn't apply.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Right. Another conversation, and we all have these conversations just about anywhere -- grocery stores, you know, walking the dog, another neighbor mentioned her daughter had a severe back injury, and she was 100 percent disabled, but she would like to get back in the workforce, and she's afraid that -- you know, she's a single parent -- she's got a daughter -- that she will lose her ability to sustain herself in that transition. Is that something you could help her with?

MR. LACOMBE:

Well, the Medicaid program, the way that it works, if she was trying to transition back, they actually have a transitional Medicaid so you're not just cut off once you become ineligible. Like I said, there's so many different categories and eligibility levels and programs that it's very hard to find somebody who's not eligible almost.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

That's good to hear. Thank you. Legislator Krupski.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Thank you. I guess I'll ask Albert, from one Albert to another. How have you done outreach? And I know Holly is here in the back. Have you worked with different human resource centers throughout -- what the towns run to make sure they know that this assistance is out there?

MR. LACOMBE:

I'm actually going to defer that to Michelle because she is the outreach coordinator. She has been out in the community and has been out doing the meetings and coordinating everything. That's a big part of what she does, so I'll let her speak to that.

MS. BATES:

I've spoken with both Suffolk County and Nassau County Offices of the Aging. I have been to long-term care counseling meetings and regularly attend those meetings each quarter. We do a lot

of outreach to, you know -- I'm trying to think. We do so much outreach. Right now, we're concentrating on the disabled population, so a lot of the agencies we're communicating with are OPWDD. We work closely with Northport V.A. We're there every Wednesday of the month. They do a lot of referral. We work on appointment with them. We work with all of the hospitals, and we have infiltrated the hospitals with all of our information as well. Just coming from the hospital council, all of our information is out in that regard. We did a push back in August with Town of Hempstead. They did a push for the program, and we were in, I believe, it was six senior centers in Nassau County, but it hasn't been a viable site location going forward. The town had us there for two months, and then that was kind of the end with that, so we've been in mostly libraries in Nassau County.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

I know there's active human resource centers on the east end, certainly one in Mattituck and one in Riverhead.

MS. BATES:

We have a site location there.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Oh, you do?

MS. BATES:

We do, a human resource center in Southold.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Oh, good. Okay.

MS. BATES:

We're there on a regular monthly basis. Yeah, Family Service League in Riverhead. We start this coming month, actually.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Legislator Cilmi.

LEG. CILMI:

So one of your -- one good opportunity might be historical societies. I find that many of them have robust membership and meeting attendance, and oftentimes they're folks who are older and maybe experiencing some of the problems that you're trying to deal with. I know macular degeneration among older folks, particularly, has become a big, big problem, and to the extent that your services are available for that population, it might be something that's worthy of addressing. Have you found that? Have you found in your work that you're seeing a larger number of cases where macular degeneration has impacted eyesight to the extent that it really disables individuals?

MR. LACOMBE:

We don't actually deal with the specific diseases; we just deal with the coverages for them, but what we are seeing is that the senior population now, like Michelle said earlier, is paying for elder care lawyers and attorneys to do a simple Medicaid application that we do for free, and Department of Social Services has been doing it, but the push is by the state to actually get this out more into the communities and open up the doors for this population so they're not being charged these exorbitant fees to do a simple process.

LEG. CILMI:

You'd think they just make the process simpler. Or maybe you wouldn't think that. I don't know.

MR. LACOMBE:

Well, you could walk into Department of Social Services and put it in an application; it really is that easy. But what we do is going out to the libraries, and I think it's a population that can't get out and is handicapped or the elderly, they can't get out in the winter, so we will do home visits in that case, stuff that Department of Social Services doesn't necessarily provide because of their limitations on their staff.

LEG. CILMI:

Right, so the application itself is relatively simple, you're saying?

MS. BATES:

It's simple to us.

LEG. CILMI:

Right.

MS. BATES:

When you've seen the application over and over and over again, it really becomes --

LEG. CILMI:

How many pages is it?

MS. BATES:

Seven, I think.

LEG. CILMI:

So just off the top -- I mean, that's not simple.

MS. BATES:

Like I said, it's simple to us. The application, it's very straightforward. It asks for your name, your address, your household members, et cetera. Facilitated enrollment has been around since 2000 -- right, 2000?

MR. LACOMBE:

Yeah, 2000 (indiscernible).

MS. BATES:

Original facilitated enrollment has been around since 2000 because people had issues with filling out the application, so agencies, like Nassau Suffolk Hospital Council, has been doing facilitated enrollment since 2000. It is confusing to folks, especially those that have never entered into the insurance world before. Most people have insurance through their jobs up until the time that they retire, so they don't have to really think about it; this is what their insurance has offered through their work, and that's what they take. Once they hit 65 and the whole Medicare realm and all these out of pocket costs come into play, that's when they start having issues and they get this application and have no idea what to do with it, so we really are there to help them go through the entire application and make sure that it's correct before it goes to Department of Social Services so that the process on their end is that much faster because all of the information is correct and in the correct order and, you know, it goes in as a completed package rather than in pieces to Social Services. So the process takes that much longer as they are asking for more information and then the person gets frustrated and just says, Oh, I give up. When they come and they meet with us, we tell them exactly what they need and we help them try to get as much information together as possible before it goes to the local district.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

You know what we should do? You guys should have a special day, 65 and older enrollment day. I don't know how you would handle it. You'd kind of have to work out the process, but I have three of the largest senior communities in my district, all the Leisures, and I definitely will be bringing you in you in there, if you guys are good with that, to make people aware that this is something they need to do in order to get the services that are available. There are so many people that really have no idea what's available to them, and it's what we do. It's part of government, and it's what government should do, so thank you.

Anyone else? Unless you have questions, thank you so much for coming out.

MS. BATES:

Thank you for having us.

MR. LACOMBE:

Thank you.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Okay. We are going to go to the tabled resolutions. **1227, Appoint member to the Suffolk County Animal and Pet Advisory Board (Sarah K. Alward, DVM) (Spencer).** Is Sarah here today? Come on up, Sarah. As one Sarah to another Sarah, welcome.

MS. ALWARD:

My iPhone has never led me astray until today.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

This is a hard place to find sometimes, and the rain too. So tell us a little bit about yourself and why you would be good for our Pet Advisory Board.

MS. ALWARD:

First of all, good afternoon to everybody. I graduated from Ross University in 2006, and I worked for the ASPCA in New York City for two years. Had the good fortune to work, obviously, with homeless animals with the cruelty case department, so that was an amazing experience. I moved out to the east end and worked in private practice for a year and then worked in sheltering for the last six years. I've recently gone out on my own. I have a small house call practice on the east end of Long Island. But you know, welfare, has always been a huge, huge part of my life and being the voice for the voiceless, so I think that's probably the biggest thing. My career has basically been centered around animal welfare for the last 10 years.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

I have to admit I recently found a dog. I brought little Buddy into my office week. Driving to work, trying to get to appointments, there's always a lot to do, and I saw this tiny little -- Robyn, what type of dog? Like Toto the dog, tiny in the middle of the road. And, as a mom or whatever and owning pets, I knew that dog was just much too small to be in the middle of the road. Any dog should not be the middle of the road. I followed the dog. I tried to bring it to my car. It wouldn't come. It made its way to the house. I thought, Okay, great. It scratched on the door, and I watched it. I wanted to make sure it was safe. No one came to the door. So I got out. I think it was raining at the time, and I knocked on the door as its scratching on the door, and nobody answered. I left my card. I even knocked on the neighbors' houses. No one. And I brought it to my office. We adopted Buddy for, maybe, a half hour, and the owner called. She was so thankful. She did not mean for the dog to escape, but just like young children, they like to explore. That was actually the third dog I found in two years along that road, a beautiful husky, another little bog dog. But I think it's important for everyone to look out for animals because they cannot speak. They do not have the abilities as even a child might have to find their way home, and I do appreciate your

time and your commitment as an addition to this committee.

MS. ALWARD:

It would be an honor for me, really:

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Where is your practice?

MS. ALWARD:

I'm based out of East Hampton, but I serve most Southampton and East for now, for the moment until I get a little busier. Maybe I'll expand west.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Okay. I'll make a motion to approve.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Second.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? Motion carries. **Approved (VOTE: 3-0-0-2, Not Present: Stern, Muratore)**

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Thank you for volunteering.

MS. ALWARD:

Thank you. I really appreciate it.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Thank you, Sarah. You do not need to go to the general meeting. We're good.

MS. ALWARD:

Thank you.

Okay. We have **IR 1229, Adopting Local Law No. -2016, A Local Law amending Chapter 563 of the Suffolk County Code to permit use of a government issued passport as acceptable personal identification (County Executive)**. Motion to approved. I have a second. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? Motion carries. **Approved (VOTE: 3-0-0-2, Not Present: Stern, Muratore)**

Introductory Resolutions.

IR 1244, Appropriating funds in connection with the purchase and replacement of Nutrition Vehicles for the Office for the Aging (CP 1749) (County Executive). I'll make a motion to approve. I have a second. On the motion, Holly, will you step forward? I have the director of the Office For the Aging.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Hello. In connection to the resolution, each year we do a capital project for the vehicles that are used to transport seniors to nutrition sites and also to deliver home-delivered meals. We would not be able to run those programs without those vehicles. Currently, the fleet is somewhere around 55 to 60 vehicles. We purchase them. They get leased out to the programs. The programs pay for the insurance, the upkeep, the drivers, the gas, whatever it takes to run it, so this is our piece to that pie.

This year's resolution is to release the funds that were approved in 2016 capital project, which is for

three vehicles. The vehicles would be two center-aisle vehicles and one small SUV for the -- because the SUV is only going to be transporting home-delivered meals. It would not be used to transport individuals back and forth to a program, so that's the project.

LEG. CILMI:

Hi, Holly. Are we retiring vehicles that these are replacing?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

We don't increase the size of our fleets, so in order to get a new vehicle, they have to send one back to us. It goes to the, I believe, to the auction. So no we don't increase the size of the fleet.

LEG. CILMI:

Okay. And where do these vehicles come from? Is there a specialized...

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

We go off state bid. However the projects are -- we don't just purchase them anywhere. We have to go by bid.

LEG. CILMI:

Okay. So you have two center-aisle vehicles, which carry how many folks?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I think it's 14, and then it's all ADA accessible. They're the big ones, the center aisle. Years ago, we used to do the smaller vans, but it's very difficult for the people to get to the back of those vans, so the center-aisles allow somebody who's disabled or elderly to get in and out much more comfortably.

LEG. CILMI:

Are they similar to what our SCAT busses --

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Yes, yes, it is.

LEG. CILMI:

Is this funding aided in any way?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

No, this is capital project of the county.

LEG. CILMI:

Could we use SCAT busses?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

SCAT busses are a whole different project. These vehicles go out in the morning, pick people up, bring them to the senior centers, go back out to deliver meals, come back to the senior centers, pick them up, so I don't know if they --

LEG. CILMI:

But the buss itself is essentially the same?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I don't know how many passengers go in a SCAT bus; I would have to look into that. It might be that those are bigger. I'm not really sure. I don't know if they're bigger than the size we get.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

SCAT bus also has the rear section that has the lift for wheelchairs.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

We have lifts as well. They all have to be ADA-accessible for the center aisles for the disabled.

LEG. CILMI:

The reason I ask the question, Holly, is that if I'm not mistaken the SCAT busses are significantly aided by the federal government, if I'm not mistaken. So while the county lays out the money, I think we get reimbursed for a large portion of those expense of those busses. A, if we were to be able to use SCAT busses that have gone through some their life, transfer them to your agency --

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

The issue with that is that I think our contractors, if they were getting vehicles that they now have to put a lot of money in to keep them on the road probably would have a problem with that because they're on a shoestring with the budget that they have for them. We give them the vehicles, and they're responsible for the upkeep of those vehicles. We don't keep that cost in-house, so that could be an issue for us.

LEG. CILMI:

Could be. I'm just saying it's something worth exploring.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I'll look into how they get the SCAT busses.

LEG. CILMI:

Clearly, if we could be spending less money on busses, it's a good thing.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Right. We try to keep it to three, four tops in a year. Years ago, when I first started, they did a project that was 17 vehicles, 20 vehicles at a pop, so we've tried to reduce that as we we've done the projects over the years, and we really look to see how long the vehicles are on the road, and sometimes you get a lemon one, which you just can't -- you know, they come in and they say, Listen, this is what it's costing to keep this vehicle on the road. So we try to look at all the pieces and parts to replacing these vehicles when we can. I will look into how the SCAT busses are funded, and if there's any project -- I think that's the 5310 project. I don't know if that's how they get their vehicles or not.

LEG. CILMI:

Off the top of my head, the number escapes me.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

All right. I'll try to look into that.

The gentleman sitting next to you could probably give you the answer.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

It may not be --

LEG. CILMI:

But we don't need to burden the committee with that detail.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I'll look into it.

LEG. CILMI:

Thanks, Holly.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

That's a creative idea. You know, is there grant money we could also look into to help purchase some of these vehicles?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I haven't seen any. I mean, if I tried to use some of the money we use for programs, then I'd have less program money to provide service.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

And how many people use the services roughly?

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

Well, we provide 620,000 meals in a year. I think 2500 people a day get meals; 1500, I believe, are in the home-delivered, so that's how many meals are going out each day in the congregate. Not everybody takes a van, but there's an awful lot to do.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Right. It's a very important program. I mean, a lot of the elderly are homebound.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

These vehicles are going to all 10 towns and to some of the non-profits for the program. But it's kind of always been our piece of the pie: We buy and then they take care of them because you can't run the program without some type of transportation for it.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Thank you. Okay. We have a motion and a second. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? Motion carries. **Approved (VOTE: 3-0-0-2, Not Present: Stern, Muratore)**

LEG. CILMI:

Holly, just let me know what you find out about that.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I'll look into it. Thanks.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

We have **IR 1310, Adopting Local Law No. -2016, A Local Law to regulate pet grooming businesses operating in Suffolk County ("Ginger's Law") (Calarco)**. I'll make a motion to table.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Second.

CHAIRWOMAN ANKER:

Second. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions? Motion carries. Tabled **(VOTE: 3-0-0-2, Not Present: Stern, Muratore)**.

I see no further business. This meeting is adjourned.

(The meeting was adjourned at 1:01 p.m.)