

SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE
of the
SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE
Minutes

A regular meeting of the Social Services Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York on **Tuesday, August 20, 2002.**

Members Present:

Legislator Paul Tonna - Chairman
Legislator Vivian Fisher - Vice-Chair
Legislator Brian Foley
Legislator Lynne Nowick
Legislator Caracciolo
Legislator William Lindsay

Also In Attendance:

Paul Sabatino II - Counsel to the Legislature
Dan Hickey - Commissioner of Social Services
Sylvia Diaz - Deputy Commissioner of Social Services
Bill Jones - Department of Social Services
Paul Brown - Department of Labor
Marie Ott - Department of Social Services
Vicki Mo - Department of Social Services
Ed Hogan - Aide to Legislator Nowick
Ellen Martin - Aide to Legislator Tonna
Kim Brandeau - Budget Review Office
Cliff Johnson - Housing Division
Todd Johnson - County Executive's Office
Bruce Blower - Suffolk County Handicapped Services
Ken Drange
Cheryl Keshner
Bob Boehner
Jan Jamroz
Ann Druckenmiller
All other interested parties

Minutes Taken By:

Donna Barrett - Court Stenographer

(*THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 11:45 A.M.*)

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

High. All rise for the Pledge led by Legislator Caracciolo.

SALUTATION

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Thank you. Okay. We have a number of cards, and its also a pleasure when your first card is a long friend. Ann, I know you're some where. Hi, Ann. How are you? Ann Druckenmiller is the first card. Ann, by the way, could you do me a favor? Could you pass along to Father Brisotti a message? Keep up the good work. All right? Just pass along is that message, keep up the good work. Thanks.

MS. DRUCKENMILLER:

Good morning. My name is Ann Druckenmiller, I'm the Executive Director of the Gerald Ryan Outreach Center at the Catholic Church at Our Lady of Miraculous Medal in Wyandanch. I've been Director of the outreach program for the last 18 years. Since 1998, I have served on the Welfare to Work Committee that was established by this committee. As a member of that committee, I was here at your last meeting in July, and I want to thank you for the time and attention that you gave to our report and to our recommendations for the proposed changes in the DSS biennial plan, especially our proposal to increase opportunities for education as the route off of welfare towards self-sufficiency. Today, I'm here as a follow up to hear the report from the Department of Social Services. At that meeting, the idea was initiated by the Chair, Mr. Tonna, and was further developed by other Legislators to convene all the stakeholders for a round table discussion. This would be a session for exchange and for dialog with all who are involved in the education piece of the Welfare to Work process. The following agencies were named by your committee to be included in the round table; Department of Social Services, Department of Labor, BOCES, Suffolk Community College and the LIA, the Long Island Association. I really think that you are onto something here, getting all the players to sit down, dialog and perhaps evolve initiatives and be agents of positive of change in the current policies. I thank you for your creativity and look forward to the round table discussion.

In closing, I might add that in all my years working in Wyandanch, I believe that self-sufficiency is a possibility for many of those people that I see with adequate supportive of services made available. Unfortunately, too many people we see are underskilled, undereducated, underemployed and underserved, inadequate child care, minimum wages, part-time hours and transportation problems are the barriers that doom the mothers and their families to failure even as the closing letters from DSS are authorized. The opportunities for career track education and vocational training would best prepare the underserved people to be independent. Suffolk County needs to explore the initiative of providing two full years of college as is being done successfully now by the Department of Social Service in Monroe County as permitted by federal and state regulations. Education is the key. Education is

the sledgehammer that will knock down these barriers. I thank you for your efforts in this regard. Thank you.

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CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Thanks, Ann. Bruce Blower. How are you doing, Bruce?

MR. BLOWER:

Good morning. I'm here this morning to speak on Introductory Resolution 1776. I'm speaking both on behalf of the Suffolk County Handicapped Advisory Board who met for and deliberated about a year and a half to make this proposal which would change the name of the board from the Suffolk County Handicapped Advisory Board to the Suffolk County Disabilities Advisory Board and also would increase the membership by seven people. It would add one County department; namely, Community Development. So we would have better input on addressing affordable and accessible housing issues for people with disabilities. And it would also add six members of the public representing a wider cross section of disabilities than we now presently have.

Both my office and the Suffolk County Handicapped Advisory Board strongly support this legislation being passed. We think it would move the Handicapped Advisory Board up into this century. The law creating it was initially passed in 1975, and the structure has remained the same for the past 26 years. So we would greatly support the passage of this and enactment into law. Thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Thank you very much. Ken Drange.

MR. DRANGE:

Good morning.

LEG. FISHER:

Good morning.

MR. DRANGE:

I represent the Shinnecock Hills Coalition, and I'm here to address again the homeless in Suffolk County, and specifically in Southampton Town. Let me begin by making note that of the five members and Presiding Officer representing six members of the Legislature, collectively out of you six they are two homeless shelters in your respective communities out of 16 in Suffolk County. Southampton alone has five of them, in Southampton, three of them are within a quarter of a mile of my home. My community is very very concerned because of what is perceived by us to be dumping, it is changing the character and nature of your community. It is creating a ghetto. It had abated somewhat because of our loud and very vocal protest in your local

town, but our concern is that it will be repeated come October when your summer residents and their high priced rentals start to elapse and they return home or the snow birds go south for the winter.

This past Saturday, we had a meeting at Southampton College, and I want to thank Mr. Caracciolo and Guldi for participating and discussing with our community what is taking place. Many from Governor on down whom we had vert little expectation of attending didn't show up. Part of the problem as I iterated to the committee a month ago is that different levels of government keep pointing to each other because of their ineffectiveness. We have engaged a town who is

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more than willing to work with this Legislature to resolve any discrepancies. We have engaged Fred Theile to work within the Assembly, we have engaged Ken LaValle, who's willing to work with us as it relates to the Senate, but they feel virtually powerless because the federal government block grants limit what they can do in terms of the costs associated and limits placed upon them.

The main problem it seems is that the placement of homeless once it is classified as emergency housing the cost can escalate up to four or \$5000 a month just for living in a locale, in this case, motels. When you collectively add those costs together for transportation, for storage of facilities, for importation of foods, for special education, it is not unrealistic that in certain cases families will cost this county 140 to \$160,000 per year. A typical non-special needs family is typically in the 70 to \$80,000 range. Now, these are not my numbers. These are extrapolations. When you take a typical family, and I recognize that some families are only there two or three months, but when you multiple the average of 4 to 450 families that are ongoing in this system and the budget for, as you will here from Social Services, 17, 16, 17% increase representing 37,000 -- \$37 million for this coming year, that request that's a budget of over \$250 million with a request increase for \$37 million. We're talking hundreds of thousands of dollars per family, per family. That's our tax dollars.

Our solution is very very basic. It is far far cheaper to have site homes that you are able to pay more than \$1200 per month for the going rate or close to the going rate, so that the free enterprise system will then accept them into the community and the broad distribution. I began my presentation by citing only two homeless shelters for the members of this committee. We have five. We have created -- excuse me -- policy has created a ghetto. It is disproportionately hitting upon those of us who pay very good money and pay very high taxes to living of God's most beautiful parts of this earth. It is disproportionate. Not only are our values going down, but the quality of life has gone down as has Mary Schneider presented to you

collectively at several meeting beginning this past May. You are also creating is disservice to those within the system, they're trapped. When you put them in a motel where there is no place for them to eat, when the motels for the most part are off central areas, meaning they're not in the center part of town or close to where they can buy food inexpensively, you're essentially creating a ghetto. They are trapped there. Most of them don't have transportation of their own. Many of them do not have money even for buses or to go to a laundromat. They therefore are roaming the streets. It is not uncommon for many of them to be pan handling just to get bus fare so that they can go to a community or an area where they can get something to eat, to have their clothes washed. Some of the them are the working poor, where their children are left unattended, they don't have the money to pay for daycare. And at these emergency shelters, they are no facilities to watch the children or counsel them. They must be bused, and that bussing only takes place on an irregular basis when there is a scheduled appointment, again more costs.

Now, I have asked Mr. Pollert and his staff to do an analysis last month. I have not had the opportunity of talking with them, since

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I've been away. However, it makes good economic sense not just for the County where you are going to have -- you're expecting to have a several million dollar budget shortfall and to take a look at the expected increase of \$37 million in this budget by planning and using the money wisely. It will not only have a positive impact on the community itself, but it will raise, as you just heard, from welfare to work. When you create an environment where they are in individual homes, where they adapt the norms of the community rather than impose collectively their norms on the community, and you've heard about our police complaints, you've heard about your schooling, you've heard problems crime increases from our past presentations, we are reacting to those norms because there's some many of them in our community.

What I would like and suggest to you is that we do the exact reverse by raising the allowable rent for individual homes for these individual families, and they are individuals. What we are doing essentially is not only reducing the overall cost by millions, but we are giving them the best possibly opportunity to adapt the norms of the community itself, we are returning them to an environment where they feel normal rather than a victim or in jail in the system itself. We will constantly endeavor to bring this to your attention in various forms. We are starting to make progress at our local and hopefully the Legislative level. Everyone agrees it's a problem, but where's the will? Is it so cumbersome in government that you are tripping over each other where nothing can be done in a positive way, except pass bills and resolutions that merely add to the red tape? It seems so clear to us in the community. It seems to absolutely clear, raise

the rental for houses, reduce the four to \$6000 a month just in rental and living cost for these individual homes or families in these homeless shelters and these motels, and pay 1500, 1600 a month. To me the math is simple, you've saved \$2500 a month. Multiply that times several hundred families, multiply by the months, times the years, and I think it relatively obvious. There is no choice. That's our tax dollars.

Now, I will also tell you that in our community, we are bringing together a lawsuit against this body and Suffolk County. Failure to act on something that is so clear, it is so obvious, there is nothing being done except a lot of sympathy; we're going to visit out there, we're going to talk to you in the community, we're going to do this or we're going to pass a resolution. Where is it? Thank you for your attention.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:
Paul. Paul .

CHAIRMAN TONNA:
Yeah. Legislator Caracciolo has a question for you, sir.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:
You said a question. Ken, as you well know, and we talked about it a little bit on Saturday, and I understand you couldn't be there on Saturday, but there was a very good turn out by representatives of the community and residents of the community. Both Legislator Guldi and I did speak to the some of the issues you raised, but one thing that crosses my mind, you talk about the economics, and you make a very

strong argument and a very, I think, prima facie, case that that has to be addressed. I mean, the numbers just don't add up the way government is throwing money at this issue and really not resolving anything, because the people who are in the facilities, these motels, are victimized, the taxpayer is victimized, the residents who are near these motels are victimized in a number of ways. And you eluded to the police reports and incidents and so forth, the school districts and taxpayers in the school districts are victimized. So clearly it's an issue that has to be addressed. But my question is can you honestly stand there and represent for yourself, for no one else, that if somehow there was a willingness on the part of the federal government to be more flexible with block grant in terms of how the state administers block grants and how -- and then the state is more flexible in the way they distribute the block grants funds to counties, and realize here, and we have to make this very clear as we did on Saturday, the County is the middle man here because these are federal and state programs, New York State Constitution mandates that an individual who's in need of emergency housing, such housing has to

be provided. And clearly if you don't have single family dwellings or two families dwellings or affordable housing dwellings for these individuals, the only thing left it seems are motels. So that being the case, if the rules can be changed from the federal level on down, and now you have an influx of individuals instead of being housed in motels, being housed in single family or two families residences, are you and members of your community going to come back at a later date and complain about the dumping, if you will, of homeless people in your community? Because again, we have no control over that.

Probably eight or nine years ago, Legislator Herb Davis and I sponsored legislation in this horseshoe that would prohibit welfare dumping in Suffolk County in select communities, because we all know where these motels are available for housing. We weren't successful in that effort. Under the former state administration, we are told by the State DSS that you can't do that Suffolk County, these people have a right under the US Constitution to live where they choose. If they live -- if they reside in Babylon, but housing's available for them in Southampton, then you can't insist that they live in Babylon. So I mean, we have to put this issue in context so that some of the new members of the Legislature who weren't here at that time understand that our hands are tied in many respects. As George and I pledged on Saturday, we will work with our state and federal officials to try to change the rules by which these programs are applied. And I think we have -- you have my assurance and I'm sure his assurance that we look forward to sitting down with our state and federal officials to try to accomplish that. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:
Go ahead, sir.

MR. DRANGE:
As I tried to mention, in our community in Southampton, we represent approximately 5% of the population of Suffolk County. We have 40% of the homeless. Now, if you were to visit in the winter time and look who is in the supermarkets and who's traveling during the daytime, you would see a market difference from the normal cross section of who's out there, who's walking versus who's driving, things of that nature.

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But by the same token, what this represents to us is the quality of life. While the traffic overall drops dramatically; 75, 80%, what happens to us is the crime goes up dramatically, houses being broken into, property, quality of life, number of gas stations held up, things of that dramatically increases. But equally important is that because the number of people out there drops, homes do become available for seasonal rentals. And you oftentimes get these workers who stay out over the winter renting for very inexpensive rates. So individual homes do become available. The problem starts to arise

when individual homeowners recognize that a significant number of their home are trashed. And I know in our own community, for example, group homes that are being limited by enforcement of active rules. There's also guidelines in terms of if you want to rent out for seasons, things of that -- and permits that are being required. And at the local level, we're beginning to start enforcing them with a little more rigor than has been in the past.

But what I'm leading up to is that each level of government has to do their part, as you've eluded to from the top down if that were to be changed. But the problem that primarily sticks in our craw is there seems to be no cohesiveness, no continuity between the different levels of government, to the point where it seems ludicrous to spend a typical 7000 a month exclusive of school costs per an emergency family, when that same family could be dealt with more than adequately for two to \$3000 a month.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

I agree with you on that, and I think we all would agree with you. But my question was, and I didn't hear your answer, if the policy changes could be implemented that would permit higher allowances for emergency shelter in two family -- or, you know, dwellings that have accessory apartments, legal accessory apartments and so forth, from 1200 to a higher amount that would be equal to the market as it is today, and I think in your area you probably can't find a rental for less than maybe 1800 or \$2000 a month.

MR. DRANGE:

But that is going on right now.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

But if that were to be expanded upon, would you and others in your area come back and complain that instead of these individual being housed in emergency shelters and motels, which have other tenant problems, some of which this Legislature has tried to address, but that aside, would you come back if there was a high concentration of homelessness persons in those types of dwellings as opposed to motels, and say, look we still have another problem, and that's the problem of, you know, crime and all of the associated issues that some of these individuals tend to bring with them to communities? You still have the school impacts. How do you -- what's your proposal for --

MR. DRANGE:

We have that issue now.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

No, but what's your proposal to address the school impacts?

MR. DRANGE:

The proposed for the school impact is we pay our proportionate share of anyone who declares ours their home district, and both state and federal aid as well as local taxes go to cover that. As a matter of fact, in my school district, the Tuckahoe, we have just recently passed a budget increase for new teachers, new additions, etcetera. So we are growing. I know in Eastport in part of Suffolk County, the taxes have risen or the proposed taxes have risen dramatically in terms of what the school budget is all about.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

Twenty-two percent this year.

MR. DRANGE:

Yeah. And I know on the North Fork the same thing is starting to feel the pressure on home values, so that people are going to feel a reassessment on the North Shore and the North Fork particularly. And you're going to start to field more and more questions in terms of quality of life. I know in Southold, for example, that the values of homes have increased 20 and 25% in the last year alone. And ultimately when you start the denitrification or the acceleration of that, the taxes will increase, the demand for people moving to a higher quality of life from further west is going to increase, the extension of and improvement of roads is going to make commuting into Nassau County a viable, where you have some now, but it's going to increase dramatically. And as a result, you're going to get an influx of people living year round and the schools are going to have an inordinate amount of demand placed on them. But that also lies -- therein also lies part of the answer. Because in Western Suffolk, as an example, there have been many schools that have been abandoned because of the eastward flow of population or the aging of the population. That leaves schools available for sheltering to conduct and to reconstruct them for use as homeless shelters. The same thing exists for the abandonment of many of these airports.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

Let me ask you, let's be fair, okay? You live on the East End in a very affluent community at the Town of Southampton, okay. Are you suggesting that if the reverse were true, if the migration were westward, and all of a sudden Tuckahoe School District and Southampton School District found themselves with an abundance of classroom space that federal, state, county authorities should place homeless people in those school buildings? Is that what you're suggesting?

MR. DRANGE:

Well, modification in many of those facilities. Right now there is only one group shelter, that's, I believe, in Bellport. That's it. But by the same token, you yourself raised the hypothetical is if we need people on a temporary basis, are we going to rent out two and three bedroom houses?

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

I'm trying to find solutions with you, but in doing so, I think everyone has to realize the practicalities of finding solutions. I real don't see a solution, Ken, if you're saying what the County needs, as George mentioned on Saturday, you know, it's been well

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quantified that there is a shortage in this County as well in as just about every metropolitan area in the United States, not only in New York of affordable housing. 50,000 units is what's needed today. There are no plans to accommodate \$50,000 units of affordable housing. One of the primary reasons is that people don't want it in their backyards. If you live in a nice community and someone conjures up the word affordable housing is coming down the street or is proposed, I can tell you in one of the four towns I represent, this Legislative Body as a result of an initiative the Presiding Officer and this Legislature kicked off several years ago, where we set aside \$20 million to purchase land for towns to develop affordable housing, and why the towns, because we don't have the authority under state law to put bricks and water together to build anything. So that said, I think so far we've only had two maybe three towns come to the table with affordable housing, the Town of Huntington being one with the Millennium Project, okay?

CHAIRMAN TONNA:
Southold.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:
No. Southold, that's on hold. It's tabled.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:
The Town passed it.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:
They passed it in January, and since January, they told me, hold it in the Legislature, because we're not ready to move forward, because they're get community opposition. But that's when I'm getting at.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:
Well, the concern that I have, and just do you mind if I jump in?

LEG. CARACCIOLO:
Sure.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:
Ken I think what you're saying is basically, if you spend a little money with regard to the homes and out of the motels, you'll actually save money.

MR. DRANGE:

That's correct.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Right. Fred, we all know -- those limits are set by the state, right?

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

The reimbursement? Yes.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

In other words, if we put together and have a unanimous vote of the Legislature it doesn't mean anything, because we don't have the jurisdiction to set those rates, am I correct?

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MR. POLLERT:

You have the capability of increasing the rents and funding at a 100% County cost.

MR. DRANGE:

Which was my question to Fred Pollert when we spoke.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Right. Would it save us any money -- would it save us any money if -- even if we funded the increase at 100% County funding, the difference, would we save County money in the long run? Or, you know, based on the percentage of reimbursement we get from the state and federal government or whatever with regard to the motels and the emergency housing and stuff?

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

If I might just interject. I think overall taxpayers would see some type of savings.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

County taxpayers is what I'm concerned about.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

But the County taxpayer may actually see an increase, because you're increasing the County share, Fred said, to 100% to make up the difference. Let's say it's 1200 now --

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

I don't care about the taxpayer in Alabama to tell you quite honestly. You know, that's why I want to find out --

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

It costs 2000 a month in the Town of Southampton to rent a dwelling as

opposed to housing them in a motel.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Right.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

There's a net savings to taxpayers, plural, but to the County taxpayers, there's a net increase in cost.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Right. And it would, no matter what, it would increase even though the amount that we pay on the other end. Okay.

MR. POLLERT:

Yes, there would be a net increase to the County on a net basis.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

All right. So from the standpoint of lobbying the state, because it's a state -- the state sets it?

MR. POLLERT:

I believe that in turn the state probably has federal guidelines that they have to deal with.

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CHAIRMAN TONNA:

So we need to lobby the federal government.

MR. POLLERT:

No. Actually, probably just the state. I would have to defer to the Department of Social Services, but primarily we become a creature of the state. The state in turn has to answerable to the federal government. But the logical group to lobby would be the state to increase reimbursement rates in Suffolk County.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

We need to talk to the Executive Branch then and make sure that that's part of their lobbying agenda. We need to maybe pass our own Sense Resolution saying that this is an issue the Suffolk County Legislators are interested in; increasing the state allowable amount for housing. It still doesn't address the issue, which you can't address, Ken, really as an individual, Legislator Caracciolo's. I mean, every individual is going to feel differently. Some are going to say, great, we got rid of the motels, but some are going to say, I don't want anybody else in my backyard either. Ken can't address that, either can any individual. You know, but the concern that -- I mean, we've had opportunities, as Legislator Caracciolo mentioned. I mean, the state blew a great opportunity with the way that they've dealt with the LIDC site, with the way they dealt Pilgrim State, the way

that they're going to deal with Kings Park, where these are huge tracks of lands that could be developed, you know, into very very attractive housing, mixed use housing, different income levels, and whatever else. They blew that opportunity. And, you know, basically that was our money that went and here is probably some large tracks of land that we could have utilized.

This office, my office, has been working very hard with the hotel industry to see if we're able with regard to specifically the use of these welfare motels, quote, unquote welfare motels, whether we could dilute the effects of the welfare motels by utilizing low vacancy rates and spreading for emergency housing out through a number of other motels, hotels, and we're working on that. We've partnered with DSS to work through that process, and I think we're coming to some conclusions with regard to the hotel-motel industry outside of these so called welfare motels so that -- so that individual families could be on emergency basis, sometimes this so called emergency basis lasts more than six months, but these emergency based housing whether they would be in Holiday Inns and Marriots and everywhere else, not 30 families, but maybe one family spread out between different places. So we're working on trying to alleviate some of the problems which we de facto can deal with, but it's a very very difficult process as we've seen in other issues, when you don't have a cooperating partner in the state or the federal government.

MR. DRANGE:

I think your proposed solution in the areas that we can control within Suffolk County, for example, the motels and the prorated distribution would be more than fair.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Right.

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MR. DRANGE:

Not just to our community.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

It wouldn't be just -- and by the way, your community isn't the only one. I know that representatives, I think we have on the record somewhere in the Town minutes, that representatives from DSS came to Southold -- Southampton and said, this is the only community that really has this problem. I can tell you quite honestly in my Legislative District, the Onesti Motel is a huge problem. And not only -- I hear this on a constant basis. I get more calls about this over a period of time than any other constituent issue in my District Office. So it's not -- not only, you know, your community that is faced with this, although I think your argument is --

MR. DRANGE:
Times five.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:
-- you know with the shelters and everything else.

MR. DRANGE:
Times five.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:
Yeah. Legislator Lindsay.

LEG. LINDSAY:
Yeah. Fred, the County's portion of -- that we have to share for emergency housing, it's the same as if -- for a subsidy for regular housing ?

CHAIRMAN TONNA:
No.

LEG. LINDSAY:
No, it's different, that's what I'm trying to find out.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:
As I understand it best -- as I understand it, and I could be wrong, and I'm sure somebody from -- is there anybody from DSS who would like to come and add some light to the subject as far as reimbursement rates or whatever else? As I understand it though, emergency housing is a special criteria, and therefore, it's allowed more money for federal or state reimbursement than regular, like, Section 8 Housing or whatever else. That's -- that's how I understand it. That's his point. His point -- Ken's point is if you make the regular allowable housing in which people now could live in neighborhoods and communities and be equally -- you know, and let the market take over throughout all of Long Island in it's housing --

MR. DRANGE:
Plus the quality of life for their children.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:
Right. Absolutely.

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MR. DRANGE:
Rather than -- break the cycle of having future clients by having children just run in their own portable environment.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:
I've seen these motels, they're not pretty sights.

LEG. LINDSAY:

Okay. Could I pose that question to the Department? How much does the County pay for emergency shelter?

MR. JOHNSON:

For emergency shelter it's approximately 25% of the full cost. It's considered emergency aide. There's no cap on the amount of money that you can spend on emergency housing for a family. Whatever the 25% is, the County pays. Whatever the -- the other 25% gets paid by the federal -- by the state government and 50% gets paid by the federal government. It's a pass along that's been going on for forever really.

LEG. LINDSAY:

What is the County's share of like someone that's staying in the --

MR. JOHNSON:

Well, if it was \$4000 a month to keep somebody -- a large family in a motel, it would be \$1000.

LEG. LINDSAY:

I'm not talking about the motel now, I'm talking about Section Eight, what this gentleman is talking about.

MR. JOHNSON:

Section Eight has nothing really to do with the County. The only thing I'll say about Section Eight is that there's not enough Section Eight vouchers in Suffolk County, no matter -- no matter where they come from; towns, Suffolk community.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Because of the lack of affordable housing there's just not enough apartments out there or homes or whatever else.

MR. JOHNSON:

We don't have enough apartments. What happened is the last time the shelter allowance -- New York State sets the shelter allowance in any give county. Suffolk County has the highest shelter allowance, and you can say rent allowance instead of public assistance grant, we have the highest amount of anywhere in New York State, and that amount right now hasn't been changed the since 1988. And for a family of four the shelter allowance is \$422. So for us to pay -- pay anything over and above that \$422 would be at full County charge. So if you're talking about rents at 1200 or \$1600 a month, anything other and above that \$422 is full County charge.

LEG. CARACCILOLO:

Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:
Legislator Fisher.

LEG. FISHER:

Okay. I have a question. Now what if they were homes, single family homes, that the County owned, and those were set aside as emergency shelter dwellings so that they would come under the same type of group report, the same type of category as the motels, because they would only be used for emergency housing? Would that raise the allowable amounts of money spent?

MR. JOHNSON:

Well, you're talking about as permanent housing?

LEG. FISHER:

If the County had houses that were set aside to serve the purpose of emergency housing --

MR. JOHNSON:

Right.

LEG. FISHER:

And, of course, it wouldn't have the same people in it all the time, but it were set aside for emergency housing and people were placed in those single family homes on emergency basis, would that give us a higher allowable rate?

MR. JOHNSON:

No. It would always be the same. Whatever we pay, we would pay 25 as the County, the rest would be absorbed by the state and the federal government. We do a lot of that right now. There are a number -- we have about 150 scattered site houses throughout Suffolk County. They are operated by not for profit. Some of houses were tax default properties, some of them are properties that not for profits lease, some of them they own. But, you know, we -- in any event, we pay 25% of the cost. That actually costs us less than keeping families in motels.

LEG. FISHER:

Well, that's what I'm saying.

MR. JOHNSON:

It does. The problem is siting it, you know, for all the reasons that Legislator Caracciolo has pointed out. It's difficult to site them. You know, they have to be supervised very closely. It's a preferred way we want to go in. You know, we have --

LEG. FISHER:

What do you mean by supervised very closely?

MR. JOHNSON:

Well, you have to have case management of the families that are in there so that they fit into the community, they live by community standards, they don't create any disruption, that children go to school, everything that, you know, a family should be doing in a community is being done.

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LEG. FISHER:

But we don't have that in the motels.

MR. JOHNSON:

We have case staff from the department that operate at the motels, they go there to visit the families. But a motel is a motel.

LEG. FISHER:

From what Mr. Drange has said, though -- excuse me. From what Mr. Drange and other people from Shinnecock Hills have said, and I think even upon questioning representatives from Social Services have said, there's not someone who's working on a regular basis at the motels in Shinnecock Hills.

MR. JOHNSON:

We have case work staff that go out to the motels on a five day a week basis, visit the families.

LEG. FISHER:

They're there five days a week? They're there every day?

MR. JOHNSON:

Yes, they're there every day.

MR. DRANGE:

The key word is visit.

MR. JOHNSON:

They're visiting. It's not a 24 hour supervision or anything like that.

LEG. FISHER:

They stop in. They check it out.

MR. JOHNSON:

They're there -- yeah, they're there for a few hours at each motel. The families usually want to see them, they usually have some kind of a problem that they need help with and that type of thing.

LEG. FISHER:

And how much more intensive would it be if these people were in single families dwellings, these units that you say are --

MR. JOHNSON:

They would have case managers that visit about three times a week on -- usually -- sometimes on scheduled basis, sometimes unannounced. They -- we generally try to put the -- two things, one is the larger families go into scattered sites because, you know, the house can accommodate them, the other thing is that families that have -- that show an ability to function more independently. Families that don't, we usually try to put in family shelters, we call them sometimes congregate shelters, meaning that several families live together with 24 hour supervision under one roof. We have numerous shelters of that type throughout Suffolk County.

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LEG. FISHER:

Now, we get lists periodically from the Department of Real Estate of homes that are on the auction block because of tax default and a variety of other issues, could we be more aggressive in perhaps keeping some of those in our inventory or perhaps seeking out not for profits that might want to take those homes so that we can use them for emergency shelter?

MR. JOHNSON:

There is a vehicle for not for profits to acquire those houses right now. It's a difficult -- it has to go through the towns, they have to request the house, they have to get the approval of the town, it gets transferred through the town. It would be wonderful if that process could be streamlined and made more user friendly.

LEG. FISHER:

Okay. You're using streamlined, I'm saying more aggressive, so how could we do that?

MR. JOHNSON:

Well, I think that, you know, it's a question really for the Department of Real Estate, I would think. You know, it's something that the department doesn't directly get involved with. At least up until now, it's been the not for profit going through and applying for it, and then it being transferred to the towns. Some towns are very amenable to that, some are not.

LEG. FISHER:

Okay. So when that auction list is available, it's available to not for profits as well as to the public, and then the not for profits have to work through the town in order to acquire those?

MR. JOHNSON:

I believe it's an application process through the County Community Development Office to say we're looking for a three bedroom house in these communities within a certain township, can you look and see if there's anything within the inventory. So they don't have to know the specific site, they have to make the request.

LEG. FISHER:

Okay. Now earlier you gave a -- you gave us a number as to how much the County could spend on rent for a homeless family and that was --

MR. JOHNSON:

Four hundred and twenty two, that for a family of four. It varies depending on family size.

LEG. FISHER:

Yet for emergency shelter in a motel we're spending about \$4000 a month.

MR. JOHNSON:

Roughly. Again, depending on family size, what type of shelter or motel it is.

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LEG. FISHER:

And if we were to put in emergency -- a family of four into an emergency shelter home, a one family home, what would be the allowable amount that we can spend?

MR. JOHNSON:

It would be -- the state and the federal government would pay 75% of whatever that amount was. If it was \$4000, they would pay \$3000 total of it. We would -- the county would pay a thousand dollars. It doesn't matter whether it's a motel --

LEG. FISHER:

Because it's emergency. We don't have the same perimeters that you set forth.

MR. JOHNSON:

An each not for profit shelter submits a budget to us. We way a per diem based on the budget submission, we cover their costs.

LEG. FISHER:

Okay. So then what we're looking at is a way to streamline the way in which some of those homes that are available because of tax default might be acquired by -- because we can't buy them ourselves and use them for emergency shelter, can we, because then we would forgo

reimbursement?

MR. JOHNSON:

No, it's not so much that. It's that the County has for a number of I think very sound financial reasons decided to allow the not for profit community to provide the shelters, that we contract with the not for profits, that we don't ourselves own anything.

LEG. FISHER:

What if another municipality owned it? What if the villages said, you know, we're going to --

MR. JOHNSON:

Well, whatever it is, we would pay the cost. I don't know that it would save us any money. Regardless of who owns it, I don't think it would save us any money. There would still be costs associated with that that would be pretty much standard. We're not going to pay them a profit to do it. So it's pretty -- pretty standard. But the issue really comes down to the fact that you could build more and more shelters, but without affordable housing for these families to go to, you are just going to wind up, you know, sitting here two years from now with more and more emergency housing and no permanent housing to send those families to.

LEG. FISHER:

We all agree with that. We all know that that's a basic issue, but we are -- I think a separate issue is the emergency housing.

MR. JOHNSON:

We're working very hard to try to create more emergency housing of the shelter type not the motel type. We understand that motels are something we don't want to do. We want to get out of the motels, but

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the difficulty is to site shelters for all of the reasons that Legislator Caracciolo pointed out, it's very difficult to site those shelters. And, in fact, I'd argue that it's just as easy if not easier to site affordable permanent housing than it is to site shelters. So we might as well cut to the chase and create some permanent housing.

LEG. FISHER:

Sure. Thank you very much.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

That's an excellent point. But getting back to the economics, because clearly when you look at the economics if on one hand the state will allow \$422 a month as a reimbursement figure, there's no cap on the emergency shelter. So from the example where using 4000 a month, it's

costing the County an additional \$588 a month for many many of the people we don't have adequate single family dwellings or accessory apartments because the inventory isn't there. So there are a myriad of solutions that have to be addressed, first and foremost is to identify communities that will accept affordable housing units in their backyard, easier said than done. That really cuts to the chase as you said of the problem; until elected official on all levels, beginning with town government on up to the, you know -- the County is really out of it. All we are so the public understands this debate, we are administrating a federal and state program; is that not correct? Is that not what the Department of Social Services does?

MR. JOHNSON:

We're enforcing state regulations.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

Right. If there were no County DSS Departments in the 62 counties in this state, then maybe the state would administer it or the town would administer it. But under our form of political subdivision, it came down from on high that every county will have a Department of Social Services and part of what those departments will do will be administering these emergency shelter programs as well as all of the other things you do in the Department of Social Services. You know, the public is not aware of that. They somehow see the County, my sense at the meeting on Saturday is that, you know, the County is the big bad wolf here, that's nonsense. The County is just an administrator in the whole, you know, network of government that has a responsibility that it's carrying out. What really has to be changed is speaking with state officials to change these reimbursement rates and to allow us -- to provide us rather with more money for reimbursements for single family dwellings as you say. If you've got a 422 cap that hasn't been changed in 14 years, I dare say since that time the inflation -- the inflation's gone up 60%, if my numbers serve me right, 68%, somewhere in that area. So -- so that being the case, we're not keeping pace even with inflation.

MS. DIAZ:

Just so that you know about five weeks ago the Commissioner sent a letter to each of the Town Supervisors asking them to assign a liaison --

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LEG. CARACCIOLO:

I saw that letter.

MS. DIAZ:

-- to work with us in addressing --

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

Have you heard back from any of the towns?

MS. DIAZ:

Actually, no. For the record --

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

No. Surprise.

MS. DIAZ:

-- we have not.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

Surprise. Now, at the state level, I'd like to hear from Mr. Hickey before he retires. So, Dan, if you could come up.

MR. DRANGE:

If I may just summarize before, and I'll leave the podium.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

I was trying to give the new kids a chance.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

That's okay. Dan, have you been -- had any conversations or are you aware of anyone in the administration that's had any conversations with state officials about addressing this issue with respect to bricks and water given the County authority to actually construct?

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

We have been urging the state to come up with legislation and change the rules regarding reimbursements so that we would have more flexibility.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

Can you just for the record share with us what your recommendations -- because the Presiding Officer eluded to this earlier when he said the administration. So what is it that we are --

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

The essence of our specific recommendation would be to raise the allowances to the market rate.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

Okay. Is the County seeking any authority beyond which we don't have right now that would say to the State Legislature, give us the ability since we're not in, you know, we don't have any housing authority right now like the cities do, like the villages do and like the towns do?

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

No. We have not -- we have not broached the issue of having a County Housing Authority. We do have a Homeless Task Force, which Sylvia chairs, you know, that was set up by the County Executive and by the Presiding Officer to review those and many other issues. And some information will be coming out of there. But getting back, I know --

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

On that point before you go further, please. Is there a reluctance to go down that road in terms of creating, and I don't know necessarily that you need an authority to do this, but whatever the mechanism is for the County to be in the business of authorizing expenditures for the construction of emergency shelters?

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

As I understand it at this time the County does not have the authority to do that.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

I know that. But you said there's a reluctance to go there, to seek that authority.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

I don't know that to be the case, but if you ask me my opinion, I would think that there would be a reluctance to do that.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

And why would that be?

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

The same issue that we talked about here, the ability to be able to site and to be able to plan for that.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

So in other words, even if the state gave us authority to say, County, you can go out and bond funds --

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

I think you would run into the same problem you had with siting the children's shelter.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

Because ultimately --

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

Eight or ten years.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

Right. Ultimately it's within the jurisdictions of the towns as to where those facilities could be built?

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

Yes. Correct.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

Unless the state implicitly gave the counties in the state the

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authority to supercede town governments and place -- and place facilities anywhere.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

I'm not a lawyer, but I believe that would be correct. One of the things that I would like to point out also in the scenario where we took the \$420 some odd that a family where to get even if this County had the wherewithal to pay the difference for two thousand in rent and give them an extra \$1600, a month, under the current state law and regulations, that would then become income for that family and may actually reduce the rest of their welfare grant and take them off of medical assistance as well. So there are a multitude of problems that cross over into those areas.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

How do we begin to address the multitude of problems? I think that's really what Mr. Drange and members of his community are -- are seeking answers to.

LEG. FISHER:

That's what we're asking.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

How do we begin the dialog, the discussion, and put in place the solutions to address what clearly from a cost effective standpoint is a waste of taxpayers money?

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

You know, we get into situations, and we talk about -- the Welfare to Work Committee talks about education. We get into situations where we want to make people selfsufficient. We will never make people selfsufficient where their income is 25 or \$30,000 a year and housing costs are \$20,000 a year. So even to begin to think that we can put people into houses that go for two or \$3000 a month and then make them selfsufficient is a dream --

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

That's only one part of a much broader issue.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

For example, they're living in a house, certain level, and now you

say, okay, now you have a job, you're out of your emergency, and now you have to move from the house, and now fair with everybody else who is making twenty, \$30,000, when we already know \$58,000 a year for a family of four you don't even make it on Long Island. So, you know.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

You know, I appreciate what you are saying and I think your assessment of this situation is right on target, Mike, there have been many many newspaper articles who have covered, you know, both Nassau and Suffolk County, the Long Island region in terms of affordable housing from A to Z. And many of these problems and many of these solutions have been outlined in there, and I am not going to go over them. I can have my press secretary who refers to them a lot more than I do, he could probably cite you some of these statistics, even, even with Section Eight certificates that allow us to pay market rates, there

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are not enough houses at those rates available to house our families.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

Then I guess the threshold question becomes from a taxpayer standpoint who has that responsibility? Is it government? Is it the private sector? Is it market forces? Is it everybody as Mr. Drange says so well pointing to go each other and saying, it's not us, it's them.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

I can tell you that, you know, as I drive off of certain exits in this County I see large condo projects going up and large apartment complexes going up. How many of those are set aside? How many of those units are set aside for people who make \$25,000 a year? The affordable housing projects that we have in this County that make housing affordable to people who are making 60 and \$70,000 a year, we're doing something for. But this is the group that has been forgotten.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

Okay. So in terms of my question, under existing law, who has that responsibility?

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

The towns have the zoning responsibilities to either enforce or establish those set aside.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

That's what I had mentioned, Ken, on Saturday. Because like other levels of government, there was no one there from the town. I mean, as you said last meeting we had here, let's get everybody -- I look forward to this, I know George does, let's get everybody in the room, all the elected officials so we can speak in plain english, you know,

as to who, what, when, where and how this problem has to be addressed.

MR. DRANGE:

Trust me, we have tried numerous times.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

It's only going to get worse.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

As I said also on Saturday, it's wonderful for you and members of the community to come to this committee and to the Legislature. But as you have clearly heard, we don't have the jurisdiction, we don't have the authority to solve this problem alone. I would encourage you to get the other players in a room, George and I will be more than happy and probably other members on this horseshoe --

LEG. FISHER:

Feel free to invite the whole committee.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Just as an aside --

MR. DRANGE:

You are telling me or implying that the fly should swing the elephant.

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LEG. CARACCIOLO:

We'll see.

MR. DRANGE:

Where are you in helping us get the state level people and federal level involved?

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Oh, I'm sure Michael --

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

I can tell you over the weekend I had two occasions to speak with Senator LaValle, and we had very candid and frank conversations about this issue. And he assured me that his office has been in touch with you personally --

MR. DRANGE:

I know that.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:

-- and had conversations. And he asked me not to go into publically some of those conversations, so I won't. So I know he is very interested, very concerned, and he indicated to me very willing to do

his part.

MR. DRANGE:
Correct.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:
Am I correct about that?

MR. DRANGE:
No. I have retained his confidences and our discussions also. By the same token, I have also talked at the town level, and they're willing to do whatever is required. For example, we have introduced what is called low to moderate income housing. The argument right now, what is moderate income in our town. The number is 75,000.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:
I don't even represent your town.

MR. DRANGE:
I know that.

LEG. CARACCIOLO:
I came as an interested party of County government.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:
We want to find somebody who can represent that town. No, I'm joking. We're teasing. Thank you very much, sir. Thank you for your time. Just as an aside, I just want to leave with a, you know, a point. We did -- Millennium Hills was one of the first in Huntington where we put I think almost \$5 million into an affordable mixed use with the Long Island Housing Partnership and the Huntington -- and I'm told by a guy who runs the pizza parlor where I go who lives in that area that they are planning to go burn me in effigy. And I just said, is it

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going to be me with hair or without hair.

LEG. GULDI:
Can I come?

CHAIRMAN TONNA:
Yeah. But because I had the, you know, temerity or the tenacity or whatever else to actually advocate for affordable house in that area. And it's a very very tough situation. Okay. My office is still working on this stuff also, Ken. And just to give you some stats, and then we'll go on. Right now, I guess a two bedroom house HUD funds pay 100%, it's \$1230; three bedroom it's \$1712; and for a four bedroom, it's 1833. There are over 8000 people on the waiting list right now in Suffolk County from what I understand. Twenty five

percent of those people who qualify lost their vouchers because of lack of affordable housing. So it's -- you know, we're up against a tough situation. Okay.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:
Paul?

CHAIRMAN TONNA:
There's another card and then -- yeah, sure.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:
If I might could I ask Vicki Mo to take the stand, she had some questions that Brian Foley wanted answered. We have also have a 1:30 meeting with state officials from State Civil Service on a long term project that we've been working on for case workers, and she needs to be there.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:
Okay. I just -- I just want to have one more card, one more person fill out their card and then we'll -- I'm sure Brian will be short in asking to the point.

LEG. GULDI:
That was honest.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:
Okay. Whatever. Cheryl Keshner.

MS. KESHNER:
That's me.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:
Not bad. That was not bad. I got the Cheryl right.

MS. KESHNER:
Okay. High. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. My name is Cheryl Keshner. I've been a social worker for the approximately twenty years, the past nine which have been with Nassau-Suffolk Law Services. And four of those have been here in Suffolk County. And the reason that I'm here today is that I'm extremely concerned about the massive retirements which are taking place and the number of Department of Social Services workers who will

be leaving and the void that that will create in services for the people who are needing it in this County. We're already dealing with a system which is extremely overburdened. The worker caseload now exceeds \$300 -- 300 cases per worker. And what will those caseloads be once these massive numbers of workers leave?

My understanding is that 11 out of 12 eligibility supervisors are going to be leaving the centers. Who will be taking their place? Who with experience will help people who are in dire need to get the services that they need? What workers are telling me, what the supervisors are telling me is that there isn't going to be anybody with experience to replace them. Large numbers of people who do not have training and who do not have experience are going to be left in the centers to basically, you know, fend for themselves and try to figure it out, you know, from one case to the next. It doesn't sound to me like they really have the experience or the supervision in order to be able to that properly.

Currently -- I have gone out to many centers, and I see people being turned away at 8:30, nine o'clock in the morning. I've been to the Coram Center, I've been to the Smithtown Center, I've been to, you know, all the centers except for Riverhead, and people are turned away within a half hour of the center opening, and they're told that the emergency list is full. People who need housing, people who need food, people who need dire essential services are turned away because the emergency list is full. And that's now before the retirements. So what's going to happen to these people? Right now, when a person applies for Medicaid in the Smithtown Center it takes two months for them to get an eligibility appointment, two months just to be seen by a worker to be screened for eligibility. From there, they're then given a massive list of documents saying -- you know, to verify one thing or another, and then another list and another. And it often takes six months before they get some type of determination on their Medicaid application. Federal requirements state that that's supposed to be done within 30 to 45 days. On food stamps, same thing. While they might be seen a little bit sooner for eligibility, but still it is taken I would say an average of four months once the application is accepted. Many of my clients applied numerous times, and sometimes it's practically a year before they see any food stamps. Same thing with public assistance, it can take four, six, eight months. So what's going to happen to these people now when there will not be anybody to process their application?

Though caseworkers are overloaded and unfortunately much of that is taken out on the people who come to them who are in need. You know, and often I think they're looking for the most expeditious way to try to say, you're not eligible, sorry, you didn't meet the requirement. A person may come with papers one day late, and they're told, sorry, your case was denied. That's in violation of Social Services Regulations, they're supposed to be issued a notice, and they're supposed to be given an opportunity to submit those documents within a certain period of time. But unfortunately there are improper denials which take place all the time. We see it day in, day out.

So if these workers are not replaced, if this void is left, what's

going to happen to a homeless family who comes in the morning and says

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I have no place to go? What's going to happen to somebody whose hungry who needs food? What's going to happen to a victim of domestic violence who needs to go into a shelter? What is going to happen to someone who is ill or infirm and needs home care or needs a prescription filled, needs Medicaid so they can get proper services? I'm asking for some type of emergency resolution to be passed so that this void can be filled, because even though we are dealing with a crisis now, I understand that there's a budget crisis, the human crisis, the fallout of this is going to be a lot greater I think than anybody expects. You know, I know that many people think of people on welfare as undeserving or as cheats, but I can tell you just from first-hand experience I deal with so many people are seeking assistance, and they do not want to be subjected to this type of abuse. They do not want to have to go through all these loopholes and obstacles in order to get the help that they need. They are only doing this because they absolutely need it. Many of these folks are disabled and really have ne where to turn. So I'm asking you, please, to try to do something to fill this void and quickly. The one other request that I do have from the Department of Social Services is to let us as advocates know who can we turn to now that all the experienced supervisors are going to be leaving? Who can we go to to negotiate these crises, and I'd appreciate hearing back from them on that. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Maybe what we'll do in response to that, and I know Legislator Fisher has a question so just stick with us, Cheryl. I did vote against the early retirement. I think I was the only one. I thought it was more expensive than people wanted to let it out to be, but we'll see about that. That will pay it's time. But also my certain was specifically in the Department of Social Services. We would be very interested in getting a report from you about how early retirement is going to affect the department. I know that much have of what you do is going to have to come from the County Executive himself with regard to rehiring policy, but I think that the requests that Cheryl made with regard to finding out what the structure is going to look like to a certain extent, although I know that the Commissioner of Social Services I think has put in a his papers, we'll leave that -- we're going to have to deal with that one anyway through vote of the Legislature. But outside of that, we would like to know where do people turn. What is the table of organization going to look like? Are we going to fill vital positions with regard to, you know, DSS workers with regard to examiners, with regard to interviewers, with regard to child protection workers and the like? So that's something that I think -- it will take you a little time. Our next Social Services Committee is in probably four weeks.

LEG. FOLEY:
September 10th.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:
So that gives you about a month to put something together. We're not -- for those positions that you already know the succession plan, that's fine. For other positions, you know, just what where is -- what are we looking at? We need to look at that. And, Dan, you can count that as kind of like a last hoorah.

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COMMISSIONER HICKEY:
I'm going to make a comment before I leave, but I would like to let Vicki go.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:
Okay. Great. But we're looking for that. All right? Okay. Thank you very much, Cheryl. Just, my office, maybe we can send an official letter from this committee requesting that somebody from the Department of Social Services come with a, you know, with a plan about that. Thanks. September 10th I guess we're asking for that report. Okay. Thank you. I know Legislator Foley had a couple of questions. I do have -- hold it a second, Legislator Foley. I have actually two Legislators who say they have to leave in 15 minutes. I want to vote the agenda pretty quickly, and then we'll go to Legislator Foley, some of the questions you have with regard to institutions.

LEG. FOLEY:
There are some, but we're not going to do -- we won't be able to do justice to the issue in the time allotted because I know that Victoria has to go to a meeting at 1:30, and also they are folks here from the last meeting who wanted to be present for the Department's response to the Welfare to Work Subcommittee's recommendation. So I think we probably could only have a very cursory review of the task force that was created on Institutional Foster Care and the incredible increase in costs. If it's just an overview today, I would also ask through the Chair that then at our next meeting that we have a real in depth discussion, because that would be a week prior to the County Executive's proposed budget for next year. And when we look at an increase in over \$50 million when it was only \$10 million a few years ago. These are net dollars to the County for institutional care. There's some real real, not only human costs, but budgetary costs that we have to shoulder that that's really crushing our ability to do other -- do other --

TABLED RESOLUTIONS

(P) 1776-02 Adopting Local Law No. -2002, a Local Law to rename and reorganize the Handicap Advisory Board. (COUNTY EXECUTIVE)

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Let me begin then by just quickly, I'm going to make a motion to approve 1776, seconded by Legislator Fisher. All in favor? Opposed? Okay. That's APPROVED (VOTE: 6-0-0-0)

INTRODUCTORY RESOLUTIONS

(P) 1839-02 To establish interagency task force to develop policy addressing homeless individuals. (BISHOP)

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

1839, there's a motion by myself, seconded by Legislator Fisher. On the motion.

LEG. FISHER:

On the motion.

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CHAIRMAN TONNA:

I know this is a three member task force, I guess; Commissioner of Police, Social Services and a mental health specialist from the Health Department. The sponsor of the bill is here, so maybe he could explain it.

LEG. FISHER:

The question I had was actually for DSS to -- exactly what you had asked, about the restructuring and how we would be backfilling the positions, that kind of thing.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Thank you, Legislator Fisher. I'm sorry about that. Okay. Legislator Bishop, can you tell us about this bill, what it does.

LEG. BISHOP:

It comes about and requires a brief anecdote. I have apparently a number of homeless individuals in my district who walk up and down the street with shopping carts filled with possessions. And from time to time, constituents will call my staff, I'll notice myself, and I'll say, well, who do we call to have this addressed. If you call the police, the police handle it as a criminal investigation. They are or are not trespassing or doing anything illegal, but they don't treat the individuals as potential clients in the Social Service System, Mental Health System try to get them to the proper help. I've had my staff call through various agencies, and say, well, how do you handle this. And the answers have never been satisfactory. So I think that, you know, I was surprised at that, because it's such a typical story

that we've been reading about since, you know, the 1980s in New York City. I'm surprised that we don't have a policy on how to handle this so that people who are homeless or mentally ill are being addressed.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

We're talking about like street people.

LEG. BISHOP:

Right. So obviously, the key is not to violate their rights, but it's to ensure that they're getting the proper help if they -- if they want it.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Okay.

LEG. FISHER:

Actually, that's -- there's a homeless woman in my district with whom we've dealt with periodically. And you just raised the issue that has become an issue very often, which is their constitutional rights, where some constituents will call the police, but the police can't make her go some place if she refuses to go. So this will be one of the -- the primary issues that will be addressed by the task force?

LEG. BISHOP:

I hope so. I mean, perhaps they can go beyond that if they choose to, but that's -- anecdotally, there is where it's coming from.

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CHAIRMAN TONNA:

How long -- is there a state specific amount of time in the bill?

LEG. BISHOP:

Counsel will have to answer that.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

I don't like open-ended task force. If there's a date specific time; 30 days, 60 days, 90 days, you know, they're going to get back or something like that.

MR. SABATINO:

July 31st of 2003.

LEG. BISHOP:

Good long period to work on that.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

So they're going to have a year.

LEG. BISHOP:

Hopefully they could deal with it in three weeks. It doesn't mean they have to take a year.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Okay. All right. I made a motion to approve, seconded by Legislator Fisher. All in favor? Opposed? APPROVED (VOTE:6-0-0-0)

(P) 1844-02 Changing designation of "Fight against Hunger Month" in Suffolk County. (COOPER)

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

1844. This is basically just changing a designation if I'm not mistaken from June to September for the "Fight Against Hunger Month." Right?

MR. SABATINO:

It's going back to the original concept which is September.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Okay. Great. I'll make the motion, seconded by Legislator Fisher. All in favor? Opposed? APPROVED. (VOTE:6-0-0-0)

(P) 1849-02 To select a "Woman of Distinction" in March each year. (FIELDS)

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Legislator Nowick and Legislator -- maybe you guys would like to make a motion.

LEG. FISHER:

I'll second.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Okay. Legislator Nowick makes a motion, seconded by Legislator Fisher. All in favor? Opposed? APPROVED. (VOTE:6-0-0-0)

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Okay. Do we want a man of distinction? I think we might -- maybe Legislator Haley would like to start that movement. I'm sure he has -- I'm sure that will be his ground breaking piece of legislation for this year, I'm sure. Okay.

(P) 1886-02 Accepting and appropriating 100% federal child care reserve funds and 100% federal child care block grant funds for the provision of Child Care Services in Suffolk County. (COUNTY EXEC)

LEG. FOLEY:

Motion.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Motion by Legislator Foley, seconded by myself. All in favor?
Opposed? Approved? (VOTE:6-0-0-0)

LEG. FISHER:

Motion to place it on the consent calender.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Yes. Seconded by myself. All in favor? Opposed? Approved?

PROCEDURAL MOTION

(P) PROCEDURAL MOTION 10 Authorizing retention of law firm in
connection with medical pharmaceutical litigation. (BISHOP)

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Okay. Now we have procedural motion number 10. Legislator Bishop,
this is under your sponsorship, maybe you could tell us a little about
this bill. This, I think, provides \$10,000 from our 456 account to
retain a law firm connected with Medicare pharmaceutical litigation;
am I correct?

LEG. BISHOP:

I don't know. If there's \$10,000 allocated it may not even be spent,
because I assume that --

MR. SABATINO:

It's going to be contingent fee basis. The \$10,000 was just put in in
the event that there were any out of pocket expenses that would be
have to be incurred, but it's contingent fee basis.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Okay. And although I'm basically opposed to utilizing the 456, this
is actually why you are supposed to use it and have an account. The
mechanism, if I'm not mistaken, basically the bill calls for this
committee, right, to interview law firms. We'd probably do it in
Executive Session, and then bring that to the full Legislature for a
vote?

LEG. BISHOP:

Right. We're trying to cut a step out. So in other words, this
committee will select the firm and it will be ratified by the full
Legislature.

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CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Okay. Okay. Does -- I don't have a problem with that. Do we want --
Dave, just as the sponsor, do we want one law firm or do we want to
give, you know, the top three?

LEG. BISHOP:

My opinion is that when we bring those firm to the full 18 members, that's not an efficient interview process. If this committee with six members -- what do you have, six? Can interview three, select one and the check on that is the full 18.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Okay. We -- I think we utilize that process when we did the DSS building, I think. We basically voted something here and then it went to the full Legislature, not the top three or something like that. I don't -- you know, I mean, I'm the Chair, I don't mind that. I do have -- the only concern that I have as far as my staff, I guess, basically we're going to have to send out notices or something to law firms.

LEG. BISHOP:

I guess Counsel will be in charge of that.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

How does that work, Paul. I've never been involved in choosing, you know, interviewing a law firm, except with the full Legislature.

MR. SABATINO:

The last several processes we've used is that we've -- we've notified firms that have expressed an interest in the past, which have shown at least some, you know, track record of experience and interest. Then the second thing you do is in specialized areas like when we did the MTBE litigation, because it's class action, you try to hook up with class action. We were very successful there, we got actually the number one class action law firm in the country from California to interview with us. So that -- that gets added into the process. And the third thing we do is just post an advertisement in the Law Journal just to give firms that are out there an opportunity to contact. We generally get somewhere from eight to 12, you know, firms. Then the pertinent committee does the preliminary screening process of whatever number of firms actually decide to participate. Then the committee basically decides how they want to -- how they want to go in terms of the recommendation process.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Okay. Great. I'll make a motion to approved, second by Legislator Fisher. All in favor? Opposed? APPROVED. (VOTE:6-0-0-0)

SENSE RESOLUTION

SENSE 60-2002 Memorializing resolution requesting federal government to eliminate fee to receive passport information. (FISHER)

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Final the last is a Sense Resolution from Legislator Fisher. And this basically eliminates national passport information telephone access

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fee for people getting information on passports.

LEG. FISHER:

Yes. As Legislator Bishop had mentioned, sometimes these resolutions come out of personal anecdotes that we've had in our offices with constituents. And there was a constituent who was trying to get a passport and was directed to call a 900 number, which made one wonder. And the 900 number -- and my office tried to get it and discovered that there was a high fee for that, was left on the line for a long time. We just felt that something as basic as passport information shouldn't be -- shouldn't have citizens go through such a process where they incur what could be very high costs.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Great. I'll second it. All in favor? Opposed?

APPROVED. (VOTE: 6-0-0-0)

Legislator Foley, you have the floor. We're done with the agenda.

LEG. FOLEY:

Could you also have the department respond to the --

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Oh, just I want -- Dan, I know your down there or up there somewhere. From what I understand, this is a reminder, we want to thank you. This is your last meeting, right? So I'm sure that you're going to have a private celebration after this being that this is the last meeting that you have to be subjected to the whim of renegade Legislators. But congratulations on your retirement. I know that you're a terrible golfer, and I'm hoping that with your retirement you will spend some of that retirement money on getting a lesson. And then you will not be paining the golf courses all along Suffolk County. Either that, or maybe you should invest in some grass seed. Because either way it's an ugly sight watching you play golf. But anyway, Dan, congratulations. I'm glad.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

Thank you.

LEG. FISHER:

Lynne and I will play golf with you.

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

Yeah. Girls, you are in for a long day. Ladies, you are in for a long day.

LEG. FOLEY:

Mr. Chairman, if I may then because we still have a get to the main issue of the committee, which is the department's response to the presentation made at the last committee meeting, but in the time allotted -- in the time allotted to discuss in a very cursory way the -- where we stand with the institutional care report and task force that was created sometime ago, I know there were meetings -- some meetings where held, Probation isn't here today, which is also a key component to the increase in cost and placements for institutional care. But since you have to get to a 1:30 meeting, what could you

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least tell us as an overview, number one. And number two, it's my understanding there is a draft document that has been circulated, and if so, if you don't have copies today, while I do have one, I think other members of the committee don't have a copy of this, that would be helpful so that could be reviewed prior to an in depth discussion of this issue at our next committee meeting. Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

Maybe this help, Brian, and then we can let Vicki go, but the committee did meet this past Friday to review the draft document and some recommendations. And that draft document is going to be put in final form, so hopefully we would be able to get the final copy -- I mean, it doesn't mean that the task force is ending or that more recommendations will come forward, but it's information that needs to be shared timely with you. And maybe by mid September we'll have that information out. I have no problem sharing the draft document with anybody.

LEG. FOLEY:

The draft is pretty close to the final.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

It's going to be rearranged and the format and more understandable and Executive summaries are going to be added and things of that nature.

LEG. FOLEY:

Now are the recommendations within the draft and within the final report that would be germane to next year's -- well, to the County Executive's proposed budget that he will be submitting in the middle of September?

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

Some of it is, yes.

LEG. FOLEY:

All right. And have those recommendations already been forwarded to

the County Executive to have him include those within his --

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

We do -- we do have some funding in next year's budget for additional staff that would go into the area that handles the children who are in institutions with respect to monitoring them more closely and returning them to home more quickly. And we also have some monies in there for additional services that we purchase in the community by way of non profit organizations to help keep them out of institutions and or reunite them with their families more quickly also. We also have some proposals in there to develop some RFP that would not be funded until the Legislature or everybody else agrees on it to develop more local services that are needed to keep these kids here in Suffolk County.

LEG. FOLEY:

Okay. Thank you. Victoria, is there anything you'd like to add or Mr. Jones just in the preliminary nature?

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MS. MO:

I want to assure you that contrary to the Commissioner's retirement I will be here and I'll be returning many times to answer your questions. And I do thank you for your interest in and the support of the members of the Legislature for their -- this is a very big problem, and we have been working very diligently. I just want to say that aside from the strike force, the formal body itself has met and has brought together a lot of the key stakeholders and players. And I think you'll see from the results of the final report that it is kind of a unified attempt to address this problem. I do want to assure the committee that the department aside from this strike force has been internally working on several issues on our own to focus our energies on this particular population and the services that this population needs. We are -- we've made a lot of the strides in terms of our recruitment for additional AIP foster homes. I'm going told that we have created eight additional homes as of now. So I think that's a very good achievement. We have reassigned staff, we have selected staff that we feel are capable and have the skills and qualities to work with this population. We've had some new guidelines put in place in terms of the visits that are required with kids that are in out of state institutions. We are requiring staff now to go at least twice a year to go face to face, look at the facilities, see what the programming is all about and to deal individually with each of the children. We've changed the process and the components of our Placement Committee. So there's a lot of actions that we've taken, and we're seeing some results.

LEG. FOLEY:

I also would hope that at the follow up meeting you can also talk

about how some of the state regulations have caused a great increase in the cost to the County as it relates to out of state placement of these children, and how because of however the formulas are devised in Albany, in fact, from my understanding, there's an incentive, if you will, or let's say -- I'll call it incentive for a lack of a better word, where a number of agencies create the homes, the services, they place them out of state because there's an actual increase in the amount of monies that that particular agency can receive as opposed to opening up a facility within state. So if there are also some -- some state regulations that run counter both programmatically from the standpoint of having the children that much further away from their parents, they're not on the Island, they're out of state, that's a programmatic issue. But number two, what state regulations are also causing financial harm to us as a County because of way that they've formulated these formulas that have, in fact, made it an incentive for some of these providers to open up shop outside of the state? Because from what I understand, they can make more money from the state by opening up outside state than having it in state. And if that's incorrectly stated, I'd be happy to be corrected next -- next meeting as well.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

It's addressed in the report, but I don't know that it's incorrectly stated, but it's a lot more simple. The state just says, Suffolk County, this is what we have available for you, and when use it up, go some place else. It's that simple. They do not have the resources and the beds available that we need to house -- we have how many beds

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available? Sixteen beds available for Nassau and Suffolk County with a population of over 4 million people, 16 state mental health beds available in these two counties.

LEG. FOLEY:

That is a disgrace, and it's something that perhaps hopefully this report will engender an interest on a part of the state to create some more beds. Because the way some of us see it, a lot of these responsibilities are falling more and more onto local governments, and we're just really taking the full brunt of the cost of these.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

And we have -- we have been involved with the state and with other agencies. And I don't want to belabor the point now, because I think when the report comes out that I think it should be a sole subject committee meeting on that report and some of these issues should be heard at that time thoroughly. And I don't want to jump in and out of them now of them because it would be a disservice.

LEG. FOLEY:

And you still would be welcome to attend.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

And I will.

LEG. FOLEY:

As an advocate.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

I will. That's a threat.

LEG. FOLEY:

Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you.

LEG. LINDSAY:

Madam Chair.

LEG. FISHER:

Okay. Commissioner, you'll be staying there to address the education issue and the Welfare to Work issue.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

I am not going to address that. We have other staff here that will address that. I will address the retirements impact though.

LEG. FISHER:

I'm sorry, I couldn't hear you.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

I will address the impact of the retirements before we leave here today.

LEG. FISHER:

Oh, you're going to do that today.

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COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

Not in the detail that you may be expecting, but I will give you a generalization so that everybody is aware as to what is going to happen.

LEG. FISHER:

I hope Cheryl is still here. Okay. Good.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

You want me to do that first?

LEG. FISHER:

Yes.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

We have during the year and in past years tried to increase the staff of the Department to meet our ever growing demand for services and the increase in services that we have had. We have come to this Legislature in years past, and we have gotten more caseworkers. We have come to Brian, and we have gotten more child support workers. We have asked in next year's budget for additional workers in the area of Child Protective Services and some of the other areas in Medicaid and stuff and public assistance where caseloads are growing. And we have addressed the increase in cost there and the fact that the state keeps expanding eligibilities, making greater and greater populations available. We have tried to meet the demands of people seeking food stamps and other services, to meet those demands as expeditiously as possible. We do have delays with the current staffing levels, and on September 3rd, we are going to lose 142 staff. There is going to be a dramatic decrease in services.

We have started months ago to already take these things into consideration. There was a hiring freeze that was put on the County, and we had to submit hiring plans, we were the first department to submit a hiring plan in January of this year. We submitted it as soon as we saw cost savings coming up, we submitted a second one in April, and we submitted one in June in anticipation of filling every vacancy in the department as expeditiously as we could prior to these retirements taking place. Since we have started to see the number of people who have come in for retirement, we have switched people from administrative services. I have taken investigators out of our Special Investigations Fraud Unit, and I have moved them into Child Protective Services to help with investigations. We will be in the process of moving people from our Assets and Resources Division into Child Support to help with those areas. We are considering disbanding the SIU Unit temporarily to possibly help out with the lines they are going to be created in our centers.

We do at this point in time have some understanding that the rules of engagement for refilling positions are 20%. We have submitted a plan to the County Executive's Office showing exactly what that 20% will buy. And we have enough funds now that we have determined what our pay-outs for accrued time are going to be versus salary savings to cover the cost of the central promotions in 2002. And as we speak now, we are moving people into positions of supervisory positions that are required in this department to keep it running smoothly as we

speak. They'll be taking promotions without pay. We'll be submitting duty statements to the Department of Civil Service to get those promotions and get them the pay that they deserve as quickly as possible. But we'll also be losing people on the front lines, which

means are lobbies will be filled sooner longer, they'll be filled longer, we'll be experiencing overtime, we may be experiencing overcrowding, and we may have to turn people away. We are going to have some problems.

Even if all of the staff that I am losing today were replaced tomorrow, we would still experience significant delays while those staff are training. The training curve in this department is long, as many of you are aware. And we'll be having problems, and we will be submitting other contingency plans through the County Executive's Office in the next week or so. And no, I can tell you that we have requested that every position in this department be refilled.

LEG. FISHER:

Well, thank you for that cheerful outlook.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

I hate to give that as my farewell speech, but I can tell you that every division administrator and every supervisor in this department has been working diligently into the late hours of the night to try to cost out every promotion, every position and every refill that we can get within that 20% and also to analysis the impact of every single position that we do not refill, and that information will be available in the coming weeks.

LEG. FISHER:

Okay. This was a thumbnail sketch of where we are, and you'll continue -- the department will continue to apprise the committee as you fill the positions, as you evaluate where we're going and the impact that the retirement has had. But you had said earlier in your statement -- earlier in your statement, Dan, that you had actually requested an increase over the staff that you had before the retirement.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

In our 2003 budget, we have asked for 41 new additional staff.

LEG. FISHER:

Other and above.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

Other and above what we had this year, that's correct. And I guess if you give me the door to say that, you know, any consideration for abolishing positions in this department that are used for mandated services would be a disaster, would be a -- would be a step back that will take us forever to overcome.

LEG. FISHER:

Aren't there state guidelines with regards to numbers of clients per caseworker?

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

Unfortunately, there are only two positions in my department that are mandated by the state, it is the Commissioner's position and the Director of Staff Development. Every other position in the Department of Social Services under county Law is considered discretionary.

LEG. FISHER:

So although there are guidelines, the actual filling of those positions are discretionary.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

There no specific state guidelines, but, you know, there are guidelines that, you know, are predicted by, you know, common sense in terms of how long our lines are. There are guidelines and mandates that we have to meet. We have give eligibility determination interviews to people within 30 days, we're probably at 45 right now.

LEG. FISHER:

Earlier someone said four months.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

The same thing -- in Medicaid, about six months ago, until we took corrective action, it was taking four months to get an appointment. We have it down to two, but September 3rd, it's going to start to go back in the other direction.

LEG. FISHER:

Are there any questions from ant other members of the committee? Okay. Then we can go to the discussion based on the response to what had been presented last month.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

Then as my final comment, let me just say it hasn't always been a pleasure, but in many respects it has been a pleasure coming here. And, you know, I know sometimes we've had differences of opinion, but, you know, I'm going to miss this job, and I'll miss you guys too.

LEG. FISHER:

Well, thank you very much. And good luck to you, Dan.

LEG. FOLEY:

Good luck, Dan. Good luck.

APPLAUSE

LEG. FOLEY:

Madam Chair, it's my understanding that Dan had served the public for

39 years, Dan? Thirty nine years between town and County government here in Suffolk.

LEG. FISHER:

Hence the smile when he says good-bye.

LEG. FOLEY:

The best of luck to you, and we know we'll see you in some other capacity here.

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LEG. FISHER:

He promised or threatened to be back. Oh, Dan, I did have one more question. I'm sorry, Dan. Can you come back up, I just had one quick question. And I don't know if this will be addressed when the -- when the report comes up on the institution.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

My handicap is 16 so I'm not as bad as Paul said I was.

LEG. FISHER:

Maxine Postal had introduced a resolution --

CHAIRMAN TONNA:

I heard that. No way that man has a 16 handicap. You don't count all your strokes, trust me.

LEG. GULDI:

And you don't think he listens.

LEG. FISHER:

Dan, Maxine Postal had introduced a resolution several months ago. She had worked on this with Judge Fitzgibbon where there would be interdepartmental consultation with regards to looking at cases, wholistically with the Courts, Probation, Social Services. Do you think that -- is that addressed, that kind of view and approach, is that addressed at all by the task force?

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

As an offshoot, yes. In actuality the court had some problems with the legislation and --

LEG. FISHER:

I spoke briefly with Judge Oshrin about it.

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

But we in the department even prior to the task force and during the task force have had ongoing conversations with the court and some of the problems that we were experiencing over there and trying to figure

out how everybody could work together. And, you know, that -- that effort has expanded, and Maxine is part of that. We had a meeting last Thursday in Judge Oshrin's Office with some of the court people and some of the other players in the County and the courts. And hopefully we're getting our message across.

LEG. FISHER:

Well, that could realize a cost savings, couldn't it, if we --

COMMISSIONER HICKEY:

The basics of it are covered, you know, and the judge has a copy of the draft task force report too. And what the judges will tell you, if we can develop a type of local services that they -- that they need that meets the requirements of these kids, they will place kids locally. If we can't, they won't. So the ball is in our court for many of the recommendations that we have to come up with.

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LEG. FISHER:

Okay. Dan, he's not here, I believe you on the handicap. Okay. Thanks. Okay. Now to the -- our primary issue.

MS. DIAZ:

Good afternoon.

LEG. FISHER:

Hi, Sylvia.

MS. DIAZ:

It was good morning. I didn't get a chance to tell that, but good morning too. I have Paul Brown from the Department of Labor here today, and also Marie Ott, who is with our Clients Benefit Division. And they are going to both address some of the issues raised in the plan that -- that you've asked us to respond to. So I don't know if Marie, if you want to start.

MS. OTT:

Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to respond to the items that were identified by the -- by Mr. Koubek and other members of the Welfare to Work Subcommittee. I would like to begin by talking about the biennial plan. The biennial plan is a state requirement that each local district files, which sets the format for how we will administer our employment program in Suffolk County. Now, much of the plan is in a state prescribed form, and we fill in the blanks. And it also allows the state to file with the federal government how Suffolk County is going to meet the welfare reform regulations that are governing our Family Assistance Program.

I wanted to give you that background because many of the items that

you may see in the biennial plan may appear curious as to why we put them in that particular place, but it's because it is a prescribed format, and again, we're trying to comply with federal regulations. I will now like to turn the initial discussion of the sections of the biennial plan over to Paul Brown, who will touch on Section 3.2, the orientation piece.

MR. BROWN:

Can everyone hear me okay? Okay. My department is charged with the responsibility of providing orientation for public assistance recipients that come through the {SWEP} program. It's -- the orientation that's conducted is a four day orientation. And one of the recommendations that were given to you at your last committee meeting was that a written statement of the client right to educational placement be included. There are several written documents that are included in the handouts that are given at the orientation. There are discussions of GED Program, there are handouts for the External Degree Program, also the Grasp Program all dealing with obtaining a high school diploma. There is a handout that discusses educational opportunities as far as vocational programs that are approved by the Department of Labor and even tuition assistance that might be paid for under the {SWEP} guidelines.

Now, the orientation, however, because of its length, our counselors who provide this orientation discuss in length vocational educational

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programs that are available through our department and contracts that we have with educational providers in the County. Now, those -- those programs, however, wait to really get into detail. Once the orientation section is over and the clients are met on an individual basis, an assessment is done by another counselor at the Department of Labor. At that point, any educational opportunities that might be available or appropriate are then discussed in detail, and hopefully, a referral would be made to that particular program. That's about all I really would have to say as far as the first recommendation. So if you have any questions of me on that, please feel free.

LEG. FISHER:

Last month, Mr. Brown, one of the speakers discussed the fact that many people who go through the process aren't aware of all of the financial aid that's available, and that perhaps we can find better ways to inform the public as to the kind of financial aid that are available, the types that are available. You mentioned that you talk about tuition assistance, but it sounded very specific. Do you give them information on financial aid packages, what kind of programs there are?

MR. BROWN:

It depends on the -- on the training program that we're discussing, the majority of the programs that we deal with that we have subcontracts with the educational providers. The tuition is paid for by the grants that we receive. So there -- there is never any out of pocket cost, you know, for our -- our cliental. So the financial aid discussion really almost is not necessary at that point. If we're dealing with people who might be attending college at any point, certainly we really need to defer to the Financial Aid Office of the institution that they may be going to. But we also have a youth program within the Department of Labor, okay, where we have out of school, in school programs. And those counselors are in contact with guidance counselors in schools. There's the Youth Employment Center, okay, where youngsters who would be a part of that program would be given any kind of financial aid information that they might -- might need or at least refer to the appropriate agencies that would be able to help them.

LEG. FISHER:

It seems to me that this doesn't seem -- I'm feeling a disconnect between what we heard from the advocates last time and what we're hearing now, because the issues that they brought up seem to be more involved with how they were treated by DSS. You know, there were people who said that they were sanctioned if they -- there was one young woman who said that because she was going to school and traveling and working that she couldn't get to the DSS appointment, that she was told to fax something and follow it up with a telephone call, and she couldn't make the telephone call so she was sanctioned. That's the type of thing we're hearing. I'm not getting a sense that we're talking about the same -- do the other members feel that there's a connection. I'm feeling a disconnect.

LEG. FOLEY:

Well, I think what it is, Madam Chair, is they're probably going to get to that point, but the first portion of the recommendations by the

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Welfare to Work Subcommittee had to do with 3.2, which is orientation. And I think when they get to 3.4, which is work activities and other things --

LEG. FISHER:

Oh, it sounded as if you were done. Were you going to --

LEG. FOLEY:

No, I think there are others. And I would just like to focus on orientation, if I may Madam -- for a moment just to get back to that. And I won't use the word -- I won't say disconnect in this fashion, but you mentioned all of the things that happen -- that you do in the four days of orientation, however, something still moved this

particular subcommittee to state that there's a need for a written statement, all right? So is there or is there not a written statement to the clients about educational placement or about the educational opportunities that could count as a work activity? Is there -- in that four days of orientation, which to me sounds pretty intense, there still seems to be on the part of this Welfare to Work Subcommittee the need for the department, in this case DOL, to have a written statement available. Is there or is there not a written statement?

MR. BROWN:
Yes, there is.

LEG. FOLEY:
There is a written statement.

MR. BROWN:
Yes, there is.

LEG. FOLEY:
Now, you mentioned earlier about vocational education programs, do you make a distinction vocational educational programs and those programs that -- those classes that are provided by Suffolk Community College?

MR. BROWN:
No. Actually what -- what it is is that in order for us to count it as -- count education as an activity, it must be vocational in nature, okay? So that if a person attending Suffolk Community College must be taking a career oriented degree program. Liberal Arts would not be something that we would be able to count as an activity under the {SWEP} requirements.

LEG. FOLEY:
But it is explained -- if you don't -- what would be helpful for us --

MR. BROWN:
It's explained in writing as --

LEG. FOLEY:
What would be helpful for us, if you don't have it here today, is exactly what -- you could bring to us copies of what you give to the clients.

MR. BROWN:
I have that right now.

LEG. FOLEY:

You do. So if you have copies, if we could have them distributed here that would be helpful so it gives us a better understanding of what you do actually hand out.

MR. BROWN:

What I'm -- what I'm going to give you is one form that has the one statement about the educational opportunity in addition to other --

LEG. FOLEY:

What I would like also and other committee members would like is what you actually hand out to the clients.

MR. BROWN:

At the orientation?

LEG. FOLEY:

At the orientation. If you don't have that today, then why don't you get that to us because that will give us a better understanding of what you actually -- what you send out. Now, what educational providers do you use besides --

MR. BROWN:

Well, we have Eastern BOCES, Western BOCES, actually Suffolk Community College at the Tech Center for vocational classes.

LEG. FOLEY:

Now, you've read -- you've read -- you've received a copy of what was presented to this committee at the last meeting?

MR. BROWN:

Yes.

LEG. FOLEY:

Okay. So when you turn, for instance, to the Hunger Action Network, now I'm focusing on orientation, I'm still set on orientation, the Hunger Action Network, you turn to Page 2, at the very top it mentions how only 11% of welfare participants has access to education or training programs. We heard early about Monroe County. During your orientation process of -- of informing the clients, how much emphasis do you -- is there in those four days on the educational and training opportunities?

MR. BROWN:

Well, again, all of -- all of the educational providers that we use are explained during the orientation verbally. Examples of the types of training programs are given to the persons that are in the orientation as well. But again, please understand that the emphasis on -- on my entire department, quite frankly, is employment. Now, if an educational training program is appropriate to bring a person to an entry level position, that's exactly what we're going to do. But

again, the details of each of the actual training programs are more -- are done more at the individual assessment once the orientation is

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completed.

LEG. FOLEY:

All right. I have some other questions, Madam Chair, when we get to work activities and how we can make the connection between educational opportunities and work activities, but I'll wait until we get to that portion of your remarks. That's all I have to ask on orientation at least.

LEG. FISHER:

Okay. I apologize, Mr. Brown. I thought you had concluded your remarks. It looked like you were finished, and I said, well, what about the rest of it. Okay. So go ahead.

MR. BROWN:

Well, actually I'm finished with the first recommendations. So I think the second recommendations is the work activities, college education Associate Degree Program. Did you want to --

MS. OTT:

I can address that issue. The college education, I think the recommendation was to include a separate category for college education in the biennial plan, and this was all what I referenced earlier. College education is not something that we can cite as a stand-alone in our biennial plan. In our biennial plan, under vocational training, we have a statement that college education is included in that, and we would support the final year of a two year degree program. The federal government did not identify a college education as a stand-alone or a category for participation. And again, we're trying to meet the federal requirements. So when we would -- we assign someone to a work activity under vocational education, that would count as a participant and meet the federal participation rate requirement.

LEG. FOLEY:

Through the Chair, when we read the recommendation it states that this activity, which is the college education Associate Degree, is allowable for two years of full time enrollment for participants, and here's the qualification, who qualify for admission to a career path Associated Degree Program.

MS. OTT:

That is the --

LEG. FOLEY:

That's what's stated here. So how -- how is what you are saying different than what's being proposed here? Is it allowable or is it not? The contention is that it's allowable, and therefore, if it is allowable, why don't we have a more robust participation in that program?

MS. OTT:

Well, I think that there's a distinction between allowable and countable. Countable would be for 12 months. Under federal guidelines we are allowed to count individuals enrolled in a program for education and training for 12 months, that's the maximum that we

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can count. Beyond that is it be a not -- it would be an activity, it would be an individual in a non countable activity. I want to go back on that statement. I have to qualify that, because when I say countable, I'm only taking about family assistance cases and long term safety net family assistance cases. Education is not counted in any form for safety net single cases. Safety net singles is a state program, not a federal program, and the only activities that count under safety net singles would be on the job training, work fair or employment.

LEG. FISHER:

Education doesn't count.

MS. OTT:

No, it does not, not for safety net single.

LEG. FOLEY:

Doesn't count as a work activity.

MS. OTT:

Does not count as a work activity.

LEG. FOLEY:

Well, then through the Chair, then tell us why back in '96 as the presentation was made there were over 200 enrolled welfare participants at the Community College, and there's since been a 98% drop in enrollment in that program. Why has -- what has changed? Has any state or federal guidelines changed, if not --

MR. BROWN:

Back in '96, Mr. Foley, there was the program at that time was Aid to Dependent Children as opposed to Family Assistance now. And quite frankly I was totally involved in that particular program. And safety net clients were not in an educational -- educational program at that time either. So it really has not changed. What -- what has changed is the fact that unfortunately the program was a dismal failure

because what happened was in order for our cliental to at least get into the college courses they needed so much remedial programs and prerequisites that it was taking over four years for them to even get close to their Associates Degree.

LEG. FOLEY:

What's the -- did you do some tracking? Once they received the Associates Degree, even if it took a little longer period of time, did a number of them then leave the welfare rolls and find gainful employment even though it took a longer period of time? And if they -- I would imagine -- well, what did you find?

MR. BROWN:

Yes.

LEG. FOLEY:

Yes.

MR. BROWN:

Those -- those that -- certainly those that graduated did find

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employment.

LEG. FOLEY:

So I -- not that we're trying to -- to have, let's say a debate, but then I wouldn't share the thought that it was a, you know, disaster or that it wasn't working. Yeah, it took a longer period of time, but I think once they received that particular degree, the testimony is that it helped improve their chances for employment even if it took a longer period of time to reach that point. Why not continue with that program close to that level?

MR. BROWN:

I may not have been clear. We probably had in the neighborhood of 500 cases and probably 490 of them were at Suffolk Community College. Unfortunately, I cannot give you the percentage here, but the number that actually completed and got their Associates Degree Program was extremely small, extremely small. And those that did were the people that probably had a good high school background and were in an unfortunate situation and completed their program in a relatively, you know, short period of time. When I said those that were still in there at four years, never did complete their program.

LEG. FOLEY:

Just one final thought. Did you look at ways of trying to help them, like a counselor in school or a mentor in school to try to help that particular client with their studies so that they would continue?

MR. BROWN:

Yeah, oh, certainly. But it wasn't a matter of them continuing their studies as much, it was more because of again, we go and we get into the multiple barriers that our clients have. It's very very difficult for a single person to complete college at this point. And unfortunately when we counter with the barriers that our clientele have now, it becomes increasingly more difficult. So certainly we guide as best we can, but ultimately it's, you know, it's up to the individual person to be able to overcome those barriers and complete the program.

MS. OTT:

Legislator Foley, if I could comment on that also. In 1996 when welfare reform regulations changed, we along with the rest the country are a work-first county. And we geared our program to give individuals a vocational skill and to find them employment as quickly as possible. And as a result our public assistance population has been greatly reduced. Now, we have actually very few individuals left on public assistance. We show 2000 work rules eligible individuals left on the rolls, but many of them are not even eligible for our programs, because they are already employed. And in spite of many efforts to try to engage them in higher skill training or other programs they are usually reluctant to be a part of that. Also many of them sanctioned have failed to comply with one or more of our work rules regulations and have remained in sanction in spite of numerous efforts to reengage them in our program. So although we show a number 2002 work rules eligible individuals, in fact, we only have about 300 individuals that we are actively working with to try to improve their skills.

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LEG. FISHER:

Are there any other questions? We thank you very much. I don't see any other questions here.

MR. BROWN:

There is a third recommendation if you wanted to get to that.

LEG. FISHER:

One more recommendation.

LEG. FOLEY:

Three-five, activity enrollment policy.

LEG. FISHER:

The activity enrollment policy.

MR. BROWN:

It's difficult talking into a microphone and looking over glasses and

trying to see everybody clearly. As it's mentioned in here, the italics words are the words -- are what they want added to the biennial plan. So in here we're referring to a lack of a marketable skill that leads to employment which pays Long Island living wage of least \$9 an hour with health insurance. I don't know quite frankly that I can include something like that in the biennial plan. Our -- our educational programs are geared towards demand occupation. Our providers or even potential providers who submit a request for proposal to my department, they must meet certain criteria with the programs that they're offering. And we have a Review Committee within the education and training unit that sets certain perimeters, in those perimeters certainly is the school's reputation, you know, percentage of completion for the course, but certainly the biggest part is placement into employment based on completion of that program. Once that actually is done, the ultimate decision is made by the Work Force Investment Board, which is made up of private and public sector employers and people who are aware of what's needed within the County. And that Board then either approves or disapproves of the programs that we recommend that we run, so that once one of our clients completes that program, the emphasis certainly is placement. We do the placement. The school is charged with doing placement activities as well. The wage generally is going to be \$9 or higher. I happen to have a good example, and I thought this was the appropriate time to do it because two of the people -- this is from the Suffolk Community Tech Center, who recently ran and is running right now, a computer software applications program. And two of the people involved in what they call Bridge College to Work from Suffolk Community are members of the Welfare to Work Advisory Council, {Nina Leinhardt and Barbara DeFina}. Now that program the first cycle that just completed had only eight people in the class, three of them have been placed so far, and the hourly wage has been \$10.25 an hour, \$11.50 an hour an \$12.50. So I say to you that I would be reluctant to put in writing \$9 an hour with health insurance when we're geared towards a living wage by the programs that we offer.

LEG. FISHER:

Certainly upon reading this I don't think that there was an impression that this would have been your goal, but rather setting a minimum of

what somebody who went through the training would be expecting. So if you're actually realizing jobs that come from the training that are providing higher levels of salaries for the recipients, then there would be a comfort level in having this kind of language in the plan, wouldn't you think? To say if you're anticipating that trained workers would be getting over \$10 an hour, then certainly there wouldn't be an issue with having \$9 an hour plus benefits listed part of the plan, because your goal is to get them something higher than that.

MR. BROWN:

My goal is to get them higher than that.

LEG. FISHER:

Yeah.

MR. BROWN:

I might need help here.

LEG. FISHER:

Of at least. It's saying of at least \$9 an hour, it's not saying --

MR. BROWN:

Right. Okay. I understand. I have to tell you I disagree. I don't know that putting a figure in a biennial plan is necessary. And I --

MS. DIAZ:

If I may. One of the things that I think is -- we should not overlook is that TANIFF is due to be reauthorized very shortly. The 60 month period has expired or will expire -- has expired, I'm sorry. And Congress and the Senate are debating these issues. This will change very dramatically, we think, how we conduct business with regard to this population. It will change guidelines for us, it will restructure probably -- probably fairly broadly some of the -- some of the things that we're doing. And, we have to -- you know, we're compelled to revisit that or visit that actually once that reauthorization takes place. And it's eminent actually. We anticipate that sometime this fall this will move forward. So I don't want to lose sight of that, and we can debate some of these issues as it exists today, but in a couple of months, we're going to be looking at a whole new ball of wax, so to speak.

LEG. FISHER:

My question really was just referring to Mr. Brown's reasoning with regard to not having this language in it was that you actually have most of the people going through the training or the people who successfully complete the training have jobs that are paying more than this. So that didn't seem like a viable argument for eliminating the language.

MR. BROWN:

The only way I can answer that is --

LEG. FISHER:

Are there other reasons perhaps that you don't want a number in it, is that what you're saying?

MS. OTT:

I would like to address that issue. Public assistance regulations state that no bonafied offer of employment can be refused by a recipient. If we -- we have chosen these vocational programs because we know that they are in-demand occupations, we know that there will be jobs in Suffolk County for these individuals, and we know that eventually they will be good paying jobs that will lead to health insurance. However, we also know that very often employers may start individuals at a lower wage, and after a period of time when they get to know them, they may even start them at part time. After a period of time when they get to know how the individual is working, how they are responding to authority and whatever the organization -- the company is trying to do up, then they bring them up to a level. The primary example of that would be nurse assistant. Very often they start maybe at eight or \$8.50 an hour. And then within six months time they've moved up and they receive health insurance benefits. So I think we have to be aware of where our clients begin and to set a standard which might not be in the best interest of the individual.

LEG. LINDSAY:

So in other words, what you're saying to us is we have someone on public assistance who is living a very meager life but does have some health care. And we go through this Welfare to Work Program, we train them, and we say we're going to pay them less than what they're making now with no health coverage.

MS. OTT:

Well, when an individual finds employment that doesn't mean they leave public assistance. The first thing is that 50% of their income isn't even budgetable. It's -- it's the amount that they get to keep as a bonus for working. Their health insurance is continued while they remain on public assistance. And when they leave public assistance, their medical and health insurance still is continued by the department for as long as they remain eligible under medical assistance standards. There's also Child Health Plus, Family Health Plus. So we are not saying that somebody gets an \$8 an hour job and then we cut them off of public assistance. Public assistance is still based on eligibility guidelines; what their income is, their family size, their shelter standard.

LEG. LINDSAY:

Okay. That's fair.

LEG. FISHER:

Okay. We're still on 3B?

MR. BROWN:

Yes. Because I think the last part of 3B was at again towards the bottom of the paragraph where they want to delete -- or the recommendation is to delete the sentence, "should not have a previous

history of noncompliance with {SWEP} rules," meaning that we would consider referring a person to an educational training program if they had a history of noncompliance. We don't as a matter of fact automatically reject or refuse anybody to a vocational training program because of noncompliance. We treat everybody on a case by case basis. And it truly does depends on the what the nature of the

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noncompliance was and for how long the noncompliance may have been. So I need the statement in there, because we do have on occasion where we are going to refuse someone training because of the nature of the noncompliance, and we would refer them to a work experience program and have them show some sense of commitment before we would go through the training program avenue.

LEG. FOLEY:

Is that -- is that --

LEG. FISHER:

Actually, I want to make sure that go to an italicized statement that came before that regarding child care, "be assisted by DSS to have viable plans and place for child care and transportation." So Legislator Foley has a question regarding the language that is underscored, but we'll go back to the previous language that's italicized. Okay. So I'll let his question come first.

LEG. FOLEY:

Thank you. The way you just explained it that you -- that it's -- it's the nature of the noncompliance that governs many times whether or not you'll refer the client to the educational program. That distinction you just made, let's say that flexibility, is that contained in the language of the biennial plan or not?

MR. BROWN:

No.

LEG. FOLEY:

All right. Because I think that's part of the concern here is that because it's not -- that distinction isn't made in the plan that the point then is being made by some of the advocates that if you missed one -- if you missed one day either of work or an appointment, could have been a family crisis, that that one missed appointment can be used as a reason not to allow that person to pursue some educational --

MR. BROWN:

But I think the key word there is history, where it says history of noncompliance, you know, miss a day of work or miss an appointment, we're not sanctioning anybody, and we would not refuse them training

because of that. But a history means just that.

LEG. FOLEY:

Do you know of examples though where that has been used? And it's my understanding that, and I think you may want to go back and take a look at the records, it's my understanding that this has happened -- in my office when we received calls on different matters that if there is someone missed an appointment or some other -- they couldn't get the transportation in time, that noncompliance prevented them from taking some of the educational course work that they otherwise could have taken. I think you want to take a look at that, because it's my understand that that, in fact, has happened, not just a chronic history, but just even an isolated case.

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MR. BROWN:

Then I would have to say that there are other circumstances involved in that.

LEG. FOLEY:

All right, Madam Chair, go ahead.

LEG. FISHER:

Thank you. I'd like to revisit the child care and transportation.

MR. BROWN:

Again, any -- under our {SWEPS} guidelines there are {SWEPS} Support Services, which include child care reimbursement or child care payments and transportation reimbursement. As long as someone is in what we call a countable activity, which a vocational training program is, they are entitled to child care and transportation. So I don't know how else to answer that. That is available --

LEG. FISHER:

My assumption is that if they put it here as a recommendations that there might be a problem with people not having sufficient information and assistance in obtaining those services.

MR. BROWN:

Okay.

LEG. FISHER:

That's just the assumption I'm making, because the advocates came forward and said that this language should be there.

MR. BROWN:

If we go back to the orientation again, there is a form that talks about child care or talks about or explains rather about transportation. As soon as we get -- have the person geared toward a

particular activity, we have child care representative on board from Suffolk Child Care Council, and we have representatives, we call it the {SWEP} liaison, which is part of the Social Services staff in your building who is there to fill out the forms right there. You know, we've done, I think --

LEG. FISHER:

And they interact with the people as they're going through the orientation --

MR. BROWN:

Oh, absolutely, they have to .

LEG. FISHER:

Is that what you're saying?

MR. BROWN:

Right. Right. So, you know, I'm saying that it is there. I don't know what else we're looking to put in there.

MS. OTT:

Each individual that comes through our employment program goes through

a series of assessments, the first assessment through Case Management Program, where we're looking to see if there are any mental, physical drug, alcohol, domestic violence situations. If they're deemed employable, they go to the Department of Labor and the first step is to go through orientation. The orientation is a group, and they are -- they are given a great deal of information. But beyond that, then they go into individual assessment with a labor specialist, and that's when all of the items are explored. They explored transportation, they help them find bus routes or they even provide transportation under a transportation grant that they've received for those individual who are too far from a bus route. They go over the educational and vocational opportunities, they sit and plan with the client, what would like to do, what have you done in the past. It's an assessment. Once they are referred to our educational providers, which are primarily BOCES, Patchogue-Medford School District, we use EOC in Farmingdale, they're again assessed. And if there's any difference between the educational provider assessment and the Department of Labor assessment, well, the provider calls us, and it's negotiable -- it's negotiated. It could be changed. Maybe they are functioning at a higher level, perhaps they're functioning at a lower level. But I think the important thing is to know that it's an individual assessment. We have clients that come in with only a first grade education, have no english skills, and we also have clients who come in and college. So we base all of our programs on what the -- what the client comes into us with, what their goal is, what their

interests are, and we go from there. We take it one step at that time.

LEG. FISHER:
Any questions?

LEG. FOLEY:
One more follow up, and Madam Chair, I think there are some in the audience who also would like to speak on the issue again. Let's just get to the -- to the core goal. Let's get to the core goal, and when you look at the remarks that were made at our last committee meeting. The goal is to increase the number of full time educational placements for Suffolk DSS clients to the maximum allowable under federal and state law. The examples were given that in 21 other states -- in 21 other states allow for two years of college for their -- for their clients. Now, whether that's true or not, it's, you know -- I'm taking it as true because it's presented here. I'd like to hear from you if you're prepared today to talk about that. If there are that many other states, 22 states, 21 states, that allow two years of college for how many clients is that? Is it for 1% of the clients? Is it 5%? I think the point that's being made is we're fully maximizing as we can not under federal and state guidelines the number of clients who would access educational opportunities as a way to develop the skills they need in order to get off of welfare and become taxpaying citizens, if you will, of this County.

So the first point is the department fully maximizing this -- this opportunity to have more clients on -- more clients to go through the educational route? I think the answer is no; is that not correct? We're not fully maximizing that. And if we're not, because of past failures, suppose the failures back in the late '90s where over 200

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students -- 200 clients where in the program, but very few actually graduated, is that enough of a reason to have a 98% drop in the number of the clients who are utilizing the system, when, in fact, 21 other states still allow clients to have up to two years of college?

MS. OTT:
I would like to begin by addressing the 30%. And, yes, that is -- it's a possibility to have 30% of the population in educational activities. And unfortunately we are unable to meet that quota, not by choice, but because we do not have enough clients that remain in the employable category to even make referrals to our providers. This is not --

LEG. FOLEY:
Okay. If you could just stop for a moment, because now we're getting to the core of the issue, you're saying that there's not enough --

there's not a critical mass of clients who are -- who meet what requirements?

MS. OTT:

Who are employable. Employable means ready and able to work. Of the 2000 clients --

LEG. FOLEY:

One has to be ready and able to work in order to qualify for the educational opportunities.

MS. OTT:

Correct. If someone has physical or mental impairments or in drug and alcohol rehab, those individuals are deemed exempt from our work rules, and we would not be referring them to any of our vocational programs.

LEG. FOLEY:

So we have out of -- what do we have, about 2,000 clients?

MS. OTT:

We have 2000, but of those 2000, we probably have about 300 of those are actually referable to a vocational activity.

LEG. FOLEY:

Of those who are referable, how many actually are taking -- best sense of the word -- advantage or following through on the opportunity to -- to take some educational classes?

MS. OTT:

I have those numbers, and they're done by category, because again, if I begin with Safety Net Singles we have 270 --

LEG. FOLEY:

That's going to be helpful for us. And if you come back in the future -- verbal is fine -- but if you also have this on paper and you can make copies, the Deputy Commissioner knows how well to do this, where it would be for each of the memberships. So verbal is fine -- is okay now, but, you know, we really need to have these things handed out to us too prior to the presentation so we can go along with you with

paper, as well as what you say verbally. All right. So you tell us 300 out of 2000, are the ones that are eligible for this program.

MS. OTT:

Immediately eligible, many of them are already enrolled in our program, many of them are employed at various degrees. For example, if someone has a child under six, they are required to be in a work

activity 20 hours a week.

LEG. FOLEY:

Well, you have the breakdown you said, correct?

MS. OTT:

Yeah.

LEG. FOLEY:

Why don't you submit that for the record so we can review that. Then if others want to speak on the issue, and I wish the Chair was here, because this is something that he had spent quite a bit of time on in the last committee meeting, and I know that there are others who after department's presentation they wish to speak on the issue again. But I'd like to have the paperwork that each of you is reading from so we can distribute that to the committee, because now we've gotten to the heart of the matter, which is -- which is as you say, only 300 -- currently speaking, only 300 of the over 2000 clients are eligible for employment -- for educational -- what? Educational --

MS. OTT:

Activities.

LEG. FOLEY:

Activities. Okay. And of that 300, how many are actually undertaking educational activities?

MS. OTT:

Well, I would have to add them separately. But in some categories, such as Safety Net Singles, again, we can't -- it's not an a countable activity according to state guidelines. I can't assign them and consider that a countable activity. It would have to be over and above a work fare assignment or in addition -- in addition to --

LEG. FOLEY:

Earlier -- I'm sure that you speak with your counterparts in other counties. We heard earlier about Monroe County. Do you know what they do and how do they do it differently than we do and how --

MS. OTT:

Well, we know that the Welfare to Work Subcommittee says that Monroe County is enrolling people in college. My employment coordinator contacted Monroe County, and, of course, they said that their program is only -- they use that program only when they are meeting their participation rate with the rest of their public assistance population. So in actuality I don't really know how many people they have in college or how their program is run.

LEG. FOLEY:

Well, if you could have either yourself or your staff get a hard and fast number for that that -- that would be important to see to do a little comparative, okay? How many are enrolled in Suffolk Community College of the 200 and some odd that are in educational activities?

MR. BROWN:

I don't have that figure.

LEG. FOLEY:

Of the 270 who are undertaking some kind of educational activities, how many are going to the Community College?

MR. BROWN:

If we're talking an Associate Degree Program at the Community College, we're talking about seven people.

LEG. FOLEY:

Seven out of the 270. Okay. What else are we talking about at the Community College besides the Associates Degree?

MR. BROWN:

There was -- there is the soft -- software applications program, which is called a bridge college to work.

LEG. FOLEY:

Can you give us that on paper, a break down of that? That would be helpful, please. Go ahead, Paul, please.

MR. BROWN:

Again -- all right. This will be verbally, and I'll get you a copy of the report, but our -- we run our reports on a cumulative basis. So -- and our program year begins in January. So from January through June 30th of this year, I've had 190 people in an educational type program. If that helps.

LEG. FOLEY:

It helps to have that on paper too so we can look at this, and then others who are interested in the issue would also have that to review and look at when they have to make comments on policy. All right. Any other points you'd like to raise? What have we left out?

MS. OTT:

I'd like to add, you know, as far as funding goes, funding has never been a problem for our vocational programs. Under the EDGE program, which is some state funding, our BOCES, both Eastern and Western BOCES in Patchogue-Medford, they just received approval. It's a total funding of over \$400,000 to send our clients to their -- to their organization. Again, we have trouble finding individuals that we can make referrals, and that's a state-wide problem.

LEG. FOLEY:

And you're finding trouble because of why?

MS. OTT:

Because the individuals are already enrolled or already employed or

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they're in sanction status. We have very few individuals that are pending a work --

LEG. FOLEY:

They're already employed, but here's the point. If they're already employed, are they already employed in the field of work that if they would otherwise go to college -- otherwise get -- otherwise take undertake educational activities, they then would be -- find themselves in a year or two in a position where they would be making more money? Would they be able to be in a position then to be more employable, is that not the case?

MS. OTT:

The potential is definitely there.

LEG. FOLEY:

All right. If the potential is there, is that potential reviewed when you're making these decisions as to -- as because you just mentioned that they're already employed, but they're not part of the those who are eligible to take educational activities.

MS. OTT:

They're eligible, the Department of Labor works with them to try to encourage them to enroll in a program, and they have very well response to their request to help these individuals find --

LEG. FOLEY:

Well, the point -- the point you just raised was that they're already employed, and they're not deemed eligible to take other educational activities if they are already employed, you mentioned that a few moments ago. My point is if they are already employed, then maybe the threshold question is it's not so much they're employed, the threshold question is are they employed in such a fashion that the wages are so low that they would in the long term help their situation out by taking education classes so they can get the better skills to be more employable?

MS. OTT:

Yes. They would have to be willing to go to college or go to a vocational program, and that's -- that's my point. Department of Labor has the Welfare to Work Program which continues to work with

people even though they are employed no matter how many hours they are employed, and they are unable to engage these individuals in additional vocational activities. We have another special project that we just began with a contract agency to actually go out and visit our employed clients to see if we can help them and encourage them to enroll in some of our vocational programs.

LEG. FOLEY:

I think we are going to be revisiting that particular point in the future. Okay. Well, I think we're down to two members of the committee or three members of the committee. Is there anything else, Commissioner, that you'd like to add to it?

MS. DIAZ:

No. I believe we're covered everything other than the TANIFF

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reauthorization is something we need to be mindful of. Thank you very much.

LEG. FOLEY:

Thank you. Before we adjourn the meeting, if there's anyone from the public that wishes to speak on -- on the issue, I'd be happy -- we'd be happy to have you step forward. Is there anyone from the audience? Is there anyone from the audience that wants to speak on this or any other issue before we adjourn? For points of clarification, this is not going to be an action reaction or presentation response to, but if you have points of clarification that would help us on this issue, we'd be happy to -- happy to hear from you.

MS. DRUCKENMILLER:

No, I don't really want to do that because I think it needs to be more broadly expanded, but just as a point of information, I would like to know who's responsibility it is to round up the round table?

LEG. FOLEY:

Well, I would --

MS. DRUCKENMILLER:

Is anybody going to be doing that so this could all --

LEG. FOLEY:

That's a very good question, and I would hope that, you know, the way the system is supposed to work is that the Chairs of the different committees when they have jurisdiction over different matters, such as I in Health, Presiding Officer Tonna is the Social Services, others are Public Works, it's up to the Chair and the Chair's staff to do that very thing. And I could tell you that there committee members who have spoken to the Chair about doing such, but it really has to

come from the Chair and the Chair's staff.

MS. DRUCKENMILLER:

So unless it is done, it won't happen, is that what you're saying?

LEG. FOLEY:

Well, no. I think it will be done, it's just a question of making sure it gets done.

MS. DRUCKENMILLER:

Because, you know, I think this needs to be explored.

LEG. FOLEY:

Absolutely.

MS. DRUCKENMILLER:

And I don't feel that our questions were answered. We'll be back, Brian.

LEG. FOLEY:

The points well taken, and we'll speak to the Chair again and to his staff to try to have this round table discussion that everyone would like, but it's his responsibility to put it together.

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MS. DRUCKENMILLER:

I understand. Thank you.

LEG. FOLEY:

Thank you. All right. Anything else? This is what happens when we don't have too many committee meetings, it lasts almost three hours.

MS. KESHNER:

I'll just make it short. I'm also a member of the Welfare to Work Committee.

LEG. FOLEY:

Just state your name for the record.

MS. KESHNER:

I'm Cheryl Keshner, I'm also a member of the Welfare to Work Committee, and just for clarification, the Bridge College to Work Program is not an Associates Degree Program. So when Mr. Brown implied that that was an Associates Degree Program, that was not correct. Also they made reference to transportation reimbursement and child care reimbursement, but the problem there is that for people who have to lay out that money first, they don't necessarily have the resources to do that. So there needs to be a more workable way to provide the funds for people to get to their work assignment rather

than expecting them to lay out the funds to begin with.

LEG. FOLEY:

Okay. Thank you. Hearing no one else who wishes to step forward, committee meeting is adjourned. Thank you very much.

(*THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 2:20 P.M.*)

{ } DENOTES BEING SPELLED PHONETICALLY