

VETERANS & SENIORS COMMITTEE

OF THE

Suffolk County Legislature

Minutes

A regular meeting of the Veterans & Seniors Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York, on June 22, 2006.

Members Present:

Legislator Steven H. Stern, Chairman

Legislator Jack Eddington, Vice•Chair

Legislator Cameron Alden

Legislator John M. Kennedy, Jr.

Legislator Elie Mystal

Also In Attendance:

Holly Rhoades • Teague, Director/Office for the Aging

Tom Ronayne, Director of Veterans Service Agency

Deborah Rodriguez, Director of the Salvation Army Veteran's Shelter

Joan Fotinatos, Senior Citizen Program Supervisor, Town of Babylon

All Other Interested Parties

Minutes Taken By:

Diana Kraus • Court Stenographer

(THE MEETING COMMENCED AT 9:25 AM)

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Good morning everybody. Come to order and let's go. Legislator Alden will lead us in the pledge of allegiance.

SALUTATION

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Ask everybody to remain standing and join us in a moment of silence keeping our very brave men and women in your thoughts and prayers as they fight for our services.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Good morning. Let's see, a few speakers today before we get to the memorializing resolution on the agenda. Holly?

MS. RHODES • TEAGUE:

Good morning. This is on? Hello. I just wanted to give you a heads up on up on a letter that is going out to the low income EPIC enrollees. Just when they thought they were safe because they had EPIC, there has been legislation that was passed that requires that all low income EPIC enrollees apply for Medicare Part D. EPIC will assist them in applying for Part D, but they're required to give them the information on assets in order to do that. If they are approved for Medicare Part D, they don't have to take it though. So they have to apply but they can decide that they don't want it. And that's a

requirement in order to stay in EPIC. So the letters are going out. If they haven't gone already, they're going out in the next few weeks from the state. So you may be getting phone calls in your offices. You can refer them over to our office and we'll try to assist them, but I think, you know, everybody's been told that if they're in EPIC they're good to go for the Medicare and, you know, this was legislation that was passed on the state level which I think would throw some of the people into a tiz. So I just wanted to give you a heads up that that's coming, coming down the pike.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Holly, I don't know that answer, but maybe for everybody else, any kind of penalties involved, any kind of enrollment periods that anybody needs to be aware of if any other Legislators are going to get those calls to the office.

MS. RHODES • TEAGUE:

I believe under the EPIC they would not because they have EPIC they're not going to be assessed a penalty if they go onto the Medicare Part D now. But I believe that they're not going to be able to stay in EPIC if they don't at least apply for the full income subsidy. And, I mean the full subsidy. The full subsidy is good in a sense that they won't have any, they won't have any {CULA'S} report date. But everybody knows the confusion that goes with the Medicare Part D, so it really is a personal choice whether they accept the Part D or not or if they stay in EPIC. I think statewide they are sending out 75,000 letters. So, just if you get people who are calling, that's what it is.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Then we should refer them over to you?

MS. RHODES • TEAGUE:

Sure. Our phones have been pretty crazy. We thought it was going to slow down after May 15th and they're still calling, just a lot of confusion about the program still. You know we have the high cap volunteers. A condition of our having the high cap program was that we had a separate telephone line that the old 800 number in the state could then just refer those calls to us by zip code. And that's something new. They used to have people actually answer their hotline in the states and now we're not doing that any more. The year that had the most changes in Medicare, they got rid of their hotline and they refer all calls to the Counties where the calls come from now so, it has caused a lot of issues for us, but you know, we just do what we can with them.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And are there any programs that are slated for the coming weeks or coming months to continue the education outreach effort?

MS. RHODES • TEAGUE:

At this point we have •• we don't really have anything going. I think we're going to see what happens over the summer, try to help these people and then depending what happens with November 1st enrollment we'll start doing more meetings again. We'll try to set something up. We've been partnering with all the towns. That's worked out pretty well for us. You know, we had some of the money under the {S pat grant}, and I believe the new money is coming up in next weeks legislative meeting. We've been giving some of that money out to the towns because they've been doing partnerships with us because they're working with the seniors as well. And that was 100% grant funded; grant funds that expire September 30th. So we've really got a nice network going with all the townships, so it's working out pretty well for us.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good.

MS. RHODES • TEAGUE:

Any way send them to us.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Alright great, thanks Holly.

MS. RHODES • TEAGUE:

Yep.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Okay, Joan. It's with pleasure that the committee welcomes Joan Fotinatos from the Senior Citizen Program. The Supervisor from the Town of Babylon. Yes, welcome.

MS. FOTINATOS:

I was asked to come and speak about senior issues this morning that certain

our Babylon seniors. And I would have to say it's probably the same issues that, you know, concern all the seniors in Suffolk County; number one; Medicare Part D. We have a lot of seniors that haven't even signed on. A lot of the seniors weren't able to get out to hear people that have come out from the County to talk about Medicare Part D, you know, when they initially came out to speak. So there was a lot of confusion, we've tried to help a lot of people.

If they had children that had internet access they helped their parents, you know, to go online and see what the plans are. The big confusion is, and I don't know if there is anything that you can do to help them or because it is a federal program but there's so many different plans and there's so many different medications and companies will, you know, drop medications that the seniors are taking and then they have switch up all the time. And it's very, very confusing. And they seem to be paying more money now with this Medicare plan unlike the Veteran's, they negotiated fees for the drugs, Medicare never did, there were no negotiated fees so. And now they seem to be paying, I think there was something on the news this morning, like 46% more than they were initially paying for the drugs. So that's a big issue for the Babylon seniors.

The other thing is housing. The seniors are the subsidized housing in Babylon, the list has been closed off for a very longtime. The people, the wait list, there are complexes going up all the time, you know, fifty•five and over, but they're expensive they are not for the low income seniors. They are finding it harder and harder to maintain their homes because of the taxes and just the general maintenance cost that they're physically not able to do a lot of the things to stay in their homes safely. And we do have programs in the town that address that, that are funded. Residentiary repair program that helps them, but these are like minor jobs. There are community development funds where they would have to pay back these grants to do major repairs to their home, but housing is a big concern. They really are looking for, you know, low income affordable housing.

And the third issue which is the big issue is transportation. They're not able to get to even senior centers on a regular basis. We have very limited transportation in the Town of Babylon. There's no town-wide transportation. Basically we have some feeder buses, but in order for them to get to these buses it's a walk, and then they get off at a bus stop and then it's another long walk. Some of them aren't able to do it. Our Town of Babylon Transportation System can pick them up to take them in their area one or two days a week to certain shopping or for doctors' appointments, but we can't accommodate everybody. There just isn't enough vans to do that. So a lot of them are left and cannot even get out to the centers for recreational nutrition programs and just generally get out into the community. So that's the basic concerns of Babylon. How depressed are we •• okay, any questions?

CHAIRMAN STERN:

How many seniors would you say are currently on the list right now for housing?

MS. FOTINATOS:

Oh, I would say •• housing? They would have at least 300. They're in the office next to me in the building. And they turn people away there just isn't enough.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And when you say that the list is closed, that means that they don't even have the opportunity to put their name down.

MS. FOTINATOS:

Right. At certain times they open up the list and people can, you know, come in. But right now they've been turning people away. They can't even take anymore names on the list.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And how many seniors would you say are •• participate in the towns transportation?

MS. FOTINATOS:

We have •• each center has about a hundred participants a day. Not all of them are picked up. You know, some of them can drive to the center. But they're only picked up certain areas •• they can only come to the center through the town transportation system, their area probably two days a week. And then their •• the other three days if they don't get a ride, there is no transportation for them. So ••

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Any questions? Legislator Alden.

LEG. ALDEN:

How many vans would you say Babylon has?

MS. FOTINATOS:

We have now presently fifteen vans I think. We just got some new ones.

LEG. ALDEN:

And how many senior centers do you have?

MS. FOTINATOS:

We ever four that are owned and operated by the town.

LEG. ALDEN:

So you have about 400 participates a day roughly.

MS. FOTINATOS:

Right, but some of the van are use today do just shopping and just doctor appointments.

LEG. ALDEN:

Now what do they run on a 12 hour shift or •• eight •• or a 12 hour day, seven to seven?

MS. FOTINATOS:

No, no. The centers open up for the participants, for the seniors at about 9:30 in the morning. The vans leave about 8:00 • 8:30, start to pick up and then the centers close at 4:30. So the vans have to start you know ••

LEG. ALDEN:

Oh, okay.

MS. FOTINATOS.

•• leaving at three clock, we have all part time drivers.

LEG. ALDEN:

No volunteers?

MS. FOTINATOS:

No.

LEG. ALDEN:

Okay, now when you said subsidized housing for seniors, you meant something similar to like Section Eight housing?

MS. FOTINATOS:

Yes.

LEG. ALDEN:

And, Babylon has a specific program or is it an off shoot of Section Eight?

MS. FOTINATOS:

It's an offshoot of Section Eight.

LEG. ALDEN:

Okay, how does town board over there handle as far as a zoning application, do they encourage people to build, you know, the cluster housing •• I'm not going to say assisted living but something that would cluster because of seniors it's hard to do two floors too ••

MS. FOTINATOS:

Right.

LEG. ALDEN:

Do they encourage that type of building or ••

MS. FOTINATOS:

You know, I can't •• I can't really answer that at this time. The complexes that I've seen go up are not geared for low income seniors, you know.

LEG. ALDEN:

I'll tell you where I'm where I'm going with it, and Suffolk County has the ability, not on a lot of levels but there's some levels where we can help. And one of the levels would be with the sewer systems. Because it's very expensive to put in a sewage treatment plant or actually if you build •• say you had 100 acres and you build individual houses on an acre apiece, that's 100 houses. If you allow clustering, you know, you could put something in the middle of that and leave some open space around it but now you're going to need a sewage system. That's where I'm thinking that Suffolk County can help, or work with, or partner with a lot of the towns and develop some of this either work fair •• work force housing or senior citizen housing at a reduced price as far as how much it's going to cost us to do it because clustering the housing, that's a fairly inexpensive way to go with it. And if we've already got some of the sewage capacity, and things like that •• and I brought it up the other day at a meeting. We really have to a policy on what we're going to do with any of our capacity for sewage and even if we create some more capacity down at Bergen Point, do we hook up business's up on 110? And what criteria do we use to hook that up? Do we allot some for senior center units in Babylon, Islip, Huntington where else, any place else

that might be appropriate for that.

So I'm just trying to think of ways that maybe we can start the dialogue between, you know, the towns and Suffolk County and try to provide for this. Because if you look at the demographics, we've got nothing but tons of seniors everyday, because the baby boomers now, I guess people born between '46 and '64 is that •• that's the babyboomers basically. And they're hitting, you know, I guess they're around, right around 60 years old. There's a big group of them ••

CHAIRMAN STERN:

•• you looking at me ••

LEG. ALDEN:

No, I didn't•• I didn't look at you. I was looking at you for some help, maybe on the demographic things, not age• wise. And I'm not looking at Tom either. If we can get something in place now where we start the dialogue because all it's going to be is over the next five, ten, fifteen years, it's going to become a real major problem on Long Island. So the one place ••

MS. FOTINATOS:

Absolutely, because even if people in that age bracket, you know, they have large homes right now and they will eventually look to downsize and go into something smaller. But something smaller on Long Island is going to cost them as much as they're leaving. So that's when they look to leave Long Island because in order for me now •• you sell your house and you want to

buy a condo, so sell your house for 700,000 the condo's 850.

LEG. ALDEN:

Right, but my goal isn't to preserve wealth. We should be preserving people's wealth through good government, you know, that we're not taxing them to death. But my goal wouldn't be, you know, make it so somebody can sell an \$850,000 house and we give them subsidized housing.

MS. FOTINATOS:

No, no, I understand.

LEG. ALDEN:

You know, right, there should be maybe even if it is a cluster zoning, there should be something for sale at market value. Something might be, you know, subsidized. It would help some of the lower income seniors but I think that's where we really should •• if you want to take that back to the town board.

MS. FOTINATOS:

I will. I'll take it back to the Commissioner.

LEG. ALDEN:

The Commissioner, okay.

MS. FOTINATOS:

We have a Commissioner of Human Services and she can meet with the town board on that and I'll ask, you know, if she can let me know where that has gone, and I will personally get back to you.

LEG. ALDEN:

Good because that's appropriate for any town. You know, you brought up two things that, you know, the transportation for seniors and the •• where they're going to live. That's appropriate anywhere in Suffolk County.

MS. FOTINATOS:

Right. Thank you.

LEG. ALDEN:

Thanks.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And that was really the reason why as Joan and other representatives of the towns working with the senior citizen departments to try and bring forth, you know, some of issues that they're dealing with on the most localist of levels and to really see how we as a County government can and should play an

important role in developing, sure, better housing opportunities, transportation opportunities, for our seniors.

LEG. ALDEN:

Also just one note if you want to take it back, I mean, I was in the transportation business for about 25 years. And I'll be •• becoming available, I think I have one more term after this so if the supervisor and maybe Dave Bishop would want to think of that ••

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Joan, thank you. Thanks so much for coming today. Tom?

MR. RONAYNE:

Good morning.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Good morning.

MR. RONAYNE:

Good morning. Thank you for having me. I've actually got very little to report on today other than to say that we're forging ahead, we're continuing to go work on the levels that we regularly discuss. The homeless outreach has been bearing fruit. We have been identifying and sheltering homeless

veterans. For some reason we seem to have struck a cord and we've been hitting one or two on each outreach venture. So we're happy to see that is beginning to bear fruit.

The only other new thing that I can report to you on is I met, the day before yesterday in my office with lieutenant Bob Donohue from the police department. He's the Commanding Officer of the recruiting division. And what •• what transpired. I got an e•mail. Somebody forwarded an e•mail to me from a Marine Sergeant in Afghanistan. And this Marine was concerned that because of his deployment he was not going to take the opportunity to take the Suffolk County Police test. I forwarded that e•mail to Commissioner Dormer and he put me in touch with Lieutenant Donohue and that's how we got where we got.

What the Police Department is asking of our office, and I think it's a wonderful collaboration is they want to make a conscious effort to attract as many veterans as possible to this upcoming test. That being said, they placed some literature in my offices, both in Riverhead and in Hauppauge. And I've agreed to keep them in the loop to the extent possible. We've all talked about notification when troops are returning home. On the occasions when we are made aware of these returning units or these returning soldiers, I've agreed to include Lieutenant Donohue and his staff. And when we go out and do a briefing or when we greet them upon their return that the Police Department would have a recruiter accompany us and inform the returning soldiers of the upcoming test. It's a good fit, it's a good fit.

Other than that it's, we're working the good work, we're doing the •• operating the programs and continuing to •• serving the veterans.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Eddington.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Thank you, Tom. I have something that I'd like you to look into. You mentioned the police and trying to take the test. I've been talking to Suffolk County employees, a number of police officers. And they said they are having trouble. They've been deployed, and they get the option, I believe, to continue with the salary that they get from Suffolk County or they can take the military in which case Suffolk County will compensate to make whatever loss it would be. But what they're telling me is that when they come back if they do take the Suffolk County salary, they have to give back the military salary. But they're being required to give the gross number but they're only getting the net. So that some people are telling me they're actually writing checks for \$8,000 and having to give it to the County. And I'm wondering if you can look into •• I don't know if Mr. Zwirn knows what that is, but this what hearing from a number of people. Could you check that out and find out if that is in fact ••

MR. RONAYNE:

We've spoken to several Suffolk County Police Officers. And my understanding is they are allowed the option of continuing their police pay while they're deployed. When they return, my understanding, and Mr. Zwirn may be able to expand on this, my understanding is they're responsible to repay, I think the differential between their military pay and their police pay upon their return. From •• and again, my understanding of this is, the issue is not so much that they are objecting to ••

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Wait, let me ask you •• are you saying that •• let me put this in numbers. They get \$40,000 for being a Sergeant. They get 80,000 for being a Police Officer. Don't they get the 80,000? Are you saying, if they take the County money that they don't have to pay the County back \$40,000?

MR. RONAYNE:

I think that, that is my understanding is that they would pay the differential. They would pay the forty. Whatever was in excess of what their police pay would have been.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Right. So they get their County salary ••

MR. RONAYNE:

They get their County salary ••

LEG. EDDINGTON:

•• and return anything else?

MR. RONAYNE

Essentially they would be returning their military salary.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Okay, they get the higher numbers, what I'm basically saying.

MR. RONAYNE:

Yes.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Okay.

MR. RONAYNE:

They would be returning their military pay.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Right. Okay.

MR. RONAYNE:

The issue that has been brought us to us, and we've been told that it's a contractual matter and that there's really no way of addressing it at this

point, is as you said they're being expected to repay the gross. And the gross includes thing like housing allowances, combat pay, hazardous duty pay, things of that nature. And the feeling amongst the Police Officers is that there should be a distinction made between base pay and those types of things, those types of special pays. At this time they're all being considered one. And they're being •• you know, as a gross.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

And is there a dialogue between the County and you to resolve that issue?

MR. RONAYNE:

We've had •• we've had discussions on this. And what I'm being told is that it's contractual. Even the documents that the soldiers are being asked to sign prior to deployment to opt in and continue to receive their police pay ••

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Right.

MR. RONAYNE:

That it's a contractual issue. And if it's going to addressed, it would have to be addressed in the next contract.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Or here.

MR. RONAYNE:

Or here. Certainly here.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Right, okay. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Tom, has there ever been that kind of distinction or has it always been considered just one lump sum gross pay?

MR. RONAYNE:

I don't know. I don't know. This is •• it's a relatively new phenomenon that we're at war again, and something like this is being done. So I don't know if this has done in the past.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Has there every been any meaningful discussion on having some kind of distinction?

MR. RONAYNE:

We have had some •• again, we've had several discussions it. And we've always come away from the discussions with, as I said, that it's a contractual matter and unfortunately at this time it is what it is.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Kennedy.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Tom, two things that you bring up I guess that I'd just like to ask on. One with the notification associated with the upcoming police exam. I know you maintain an excellent network with all the various posts; VFW, Amvets, what have you. It just occurs to me as many of us over Memorial Day marched in parades and things like that, there was a mix actually of individuals with the Amvets Post over in Ronkonkoma. A couple of the vets that marched were actually much younger individuals and might be, you know, folks that may have an interest, may have, you know, eligibility or •• so as you're doing your networking, as you're doing your information dispersal, I guess if theres an opportunity to put it out to the posts, that might make some sense too.

MR. RONAYNE:

That's absolutely on our list of things to do. And interestingly, and again

clearly we would be interested in having the younger •• you know, younger being relative •• we'd be interested in having these younger soldiers commit and take the police examine. The cutoff age for the exam is 35. And it can be extended up to six years by applying military service. So veterans actually can take this test up the age of 41.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Make some sense. The other thing, just to pick up on what Jack was talking about, the pay differential. It occurs to me that •• well it's a simple question. When the police are deployed under military status, is that time still time that's credited for retirement system purposes?

MR. RONAYNE:

That's another excellent question. I don't have the answer for that. I can find that answer out.

LEG. KENNEDY:

See that one, along with the pay differential, you know •• does it?

LEG. EDDINGTON:

I think it does, but I want to hear for sure.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Certainly last thing in the world we would want to be doing is promoting a break in somebody's time for credit into their retirement system. And I would wonder what happens as far as this pay disparity as well. If that adjustment occurs for salary for that particular year, that it wind up lumped up with both but not actually, you know, realizing it. Is it to their benefit or not to their benefit. I get the impression that oftentimes, if an individual's asked to go ahead and make these changes or elections regarding salary and the other things, they may not be fully cognizent of what some of the impacts are going to be, particularly 10, 15, 20 years down the road; for what it's worth.

MR. RONAYNE:

I will get the answer on the pension issue.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

I just want to add, that what the officer's have told me is one of the major reasons they go with the County is there's no interruption in pay. So their family continues to get the check. Whereas if you wait for combat pay, you know, wait for military pay, it could be a six month •• a six week thing while you're deployed.

MR. RONAYNE:

Before it catches up to you.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Right, so. I think they do that basically for their families.

MR. RONAYNE:

And I think it's important to understand that, and again if there are some difficulties in the formula that is being used for the repayment, by allowing these officers to stay on police pay, we're providing the opportunity for them to maintain their quality of life for the families while the soldiers are deployed. And the sad truth of it is, many of these people might not be able to remain on Long Island if they were relying solely on the soldier's military pay alone. So we're keeping these people in Suffolk County. We're allowing them to preserve a quality of life while their family member's deployed. And, you know, that to me is •• those are important factors.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Anybody else? Fine. Tom, thanks so much.

MR. RONAYNE:

Thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

It was good to see you. Deborah? This morning we welcome Deborah Rodriguez, Director of the Salvation Army Veteran's Shelter at the Northport Veteran's Administration Facility, the VA Facility. Deborah, welcome. We're looking forward to meeting with you and hearing from you. Last session Presiding Officer just had wonderful things to say about you and the

organization, so welcome.

MS. RODRIGUEZ:

Well on behalf of the Salvation Army Northport veterans residence and the homeless men and women veterans that we serve there, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. I'm just going to give you little background about the Salvation Army Northport veterans residence. We were approached •• the Salvation Army was approached by the VA in 1995. They were looking to partnership with a not•for•profit organization to run a homeless shelter on the grounds of the VA. At that time they were starting to call some of the units on the grounds of the VA, like the in•patient rehab. With the studies it showed that progress was just as good on an out•patient level as in•patient level and they had to close another psychiatric unit. So they were looking for a not•for•profit to come in. And Salvation Army has provided services for homeless people for many years. So we opened our doors in 1997 in partnership with the VA. Over the •• we'll be celebrating our 9th anniversary on July 1st. We have provided about 5,000 nights of lodging for homeless men and women veterans of Nassau and Suffolk County.

Our funding sources are an important issue of why I came here today. The agreement was to partnership with the Department of Social Services in Nassau and Suffolk County. Our gentlemen and our women vets have to be eligible for Social Services to stay at the facility. We have been working very hard with them in trying to maintain a healthy budget and a healthy environment for the veterans. It's usually the average of a three month stay. Right now at the shelter we have two Iraqi veterans, and seniors and a World War II veteran. So our range is large. And we're also seeing an increase in homeless women veterans.

Some of the issues that occur at the Salvation Army, we have a social work

staff. We have a staff of nine people and it's a 24 hour, seven day a week facility. We have a staff of nine. Four out of the nine staff people that I have on my staff are former clients of the Shelter who have completed the program and now are employed by the Salvation Army. We have a Social Work Department that does a needs assessment to evaluate what the needs are of the veteran who's coming into the shelter system. We do referrals to benefit counselors through the VA. We do •• we have a relationship with the Department of Disability. So we try to hook up the veterans on some basic needs to start getting their life back together. We also have a relationship with the Department of Labor for Veterans who are work ready.

Some of the issues that I'm facing though is that my budget is based on occupancy. That's the way it was set up. So I only get paid for the number of veterans in the shelter per night with the Counties. We were having trouble making budget for several years so we worked with the VA and they now have a homeless providers grant for someone who is not eligible for Social Services and cannot have their state covered. But the problems that I'm facing is that, we •• the building was designed for 87 veterans. We have never averaged over 41. So my budget is a projected budget based on 41 clients times the amount that the County gives us 365 days a year. And it doesn't give us any growth potential in the sense that it's a projected budget /and if one month I have 30 people, I'm not meeting my budget because our average that we base our projected budget is 41. So it causes some difficulties and some needs go unmet.

I'm very fortunate to have a good relationship with a lot of the veteran's organizations who when I am in, you know, need of things, come in and supply basic needs. And we're looking at street homeless people. We have to start with the basic needs for them. Get them set up with a psychiatrist, get them drug and alcohol rehab if they're needed. Medical attention. I'm dealing with a veteran right now who has been living on the street for nine years. And his social security, disability check has been going to his sister. We are working with adult protection services to check into this case. And

also social security disability because they reported to me, I think it was yesterday, that they have a case looking into fraud and neglect of this client. So he's been living on street and she was his payee. So we try to look into all those little tiny aspects that keep people out on the street, keep people homeless, keep people coming back and forth to the VA for services.

I walk around with a wish list all the time. And that's what I have to do to keep that place up and running. So if it would be alright with you, I'd share my wish list with you today. And to first of all ask you if you have any questions about what we do and the population that we serve?

MR. KENNEDY:

Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Kennedy.

MR. KENNEDY:

Thank you very much. Good morning.

MS. RODRIGUEZ:

Good morning.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Thank you for coming. And it's great to go ahead and hear about the services that you provide. To me though it is somewhat atypical or ironic that you come to us and say that in fact there is facility there that actually has a surplus of beds that are designed exclusively for assistance of homeless.

MS. RODRIGUEZ:

Yes.

LEG. KENNEDY:

We hear •• consistently hear from the Commissioner and from other groups about what's associated with trying to locate housing arrangements for homeless folks be they're family, be they're singles. What •• what •• I guess what I'm trying to get at is have you ever entertained trying to go ahead and accommodate non•veterans that might be, you know, in concert with some of the population that you see?

MS. RODRIGUEZ:

I agree with you a 100%. And we have a whole second floor that's not utilized. But since we are on the grounds of the VA and we are a guest of theirs, they have their own VA Police Department, Fire Department. It's federal property. We had talked to them about entertaining providing housing for non•veterans or veterans with a spouse because we get a lot of

calls, I'm a veteran, me and my wife are being evicted, we have no place to go. But the VA has put some restrictions. And we had agreed to them at the beginning that we would serve only homeless veterans of Nassau and Suffolk County. And we haven't been able to get anywhere with that.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Mr. Chair •• through the Chair, I guess, I'm just going to reach out then to our Veteran's Director, Mr. Ronayne. Tom, are you aware of anything associated with this or whether there may be an opportunity to have some dialogue with the director over there at the VA?

MR. RONAYNE:

I'd be happy to initiate dialogue with Mr. Shuster. At this time I'm not aware of what the technical aspects of the arrangement between Salvation Army and VA are, but I'd be happy to contact Mr. Shuster and see if we can have this conversation.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Mr. Presiding Officer.

PRESIDING OFFICER LINDSAY:

Before you enter into that dialogue, I would talk to Social Services because the homeless situation in Suffolk County has changed quite a bit. I mean, I think we rent very few motel rooms any more. And I was talking to one provider last night that provides shelters, whole houses rather than motels. And he was telling me that the County was pulling back from some of their

contracts that they have. They don't need some of his facilities any more. So before you start exploring this with the VA, I would check with DSS to see if, in fact, they're, you know, they're still looking for places to place homeless people.

LEG. KENNEDY:

That's good advice, Mr. Presiding officer. And of course I'd be happy to have a conversation with Commissioner DeMarzo. But again I guess to me it seems that where we have a facility that's operational and struggling to go ahead and meet basic budget with excess capacity and we have a cyclical issue associated with another agency that continues to go up and down, there ought to be some opportunity to look and see whether or not we can get folks for this organization if there's a surplus on the other side. I'll deal with the commissioner directly.

I would be curious though as far as what the parameters and constraints are associated with how the VA has even allowed this program to come about, and particularly where you site the situation of a veteran and his non•vet spouse or her non•vet spouse being in a homeless situation. And, and the VA not necessarily, you know, being receptive to housing them. I'd wonder about that.

MS. RODRIGUEZ:

Can I address that from my perspective and my understanding? I've been with the Salvation Army since the day it opened July 1st, 1997. And because we are located on the grounds of the VA, it gives so much opportunity to the veterans we serve because they are entitled to mental health services at the VA. They're entitled to medical services at the VA, if they need surgery, and respite time. They're entitled to drug and alcohol treatment. They're entitled

to the work therapy programs, which we work with the veterans and we partnership and meet with the teams at the VA practically on a weekly basis to work as a team together to get these veteran's from point A to point B. So the veterans that we have there, all they have to do is walk across the parking lot to receive those services. So they're not using Medicaid. They're not using Medicaid transportation because we're like, you know, our own little, you know, campus.

LEG. KENNEDY:

True.

MS. RODRIGUEZ:

So with the County that was a benefit for them. It's a benefit for us that services are right there, that we don't have to outreach into the community. Sometimes we work with Pedersen Craig if somebody's not eligible for that service at the VA. But to have them right there, it's really a blessing.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Absolutely. It sounds like it's ideal for taking a veteran who for whatever reason has not been connected and plugging them into the whole myriad of services that they may need.

MS. RODRIGUEZ:

Right.

LEG. KENNEDY:

And absolutely, positively no question on my part that it is very beneficial for those folks.

MS. RODRIGUEZ:

Right.

LEG. KENNEDY:

I'm just curious as to, you know, when I hear excess capacity; makes me wonder.

MS. RODRIGUEZ:

And to meet budget's hard, because we don't always have the occupancy. So if your budget is based on one number and your occupancy rate is less, you don't meet budget. •

LEG. KENNEDY:

That is an issue that ••

MS. RODRIGUEZ:

I don't have a block amount of money. If someone would say here's a block amount of money, run your program, regardless if you have 41 veterans in there or 32, things would be a lot easier. But we're up for the challenge. We're dedicated. Our staff is dedicated to servicing the men and woman veterans. And we're just going to keep plugging forward. And if it wasn't for the veterans organizations, we would be in a lot of trouble.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Well, I interrupted you••

MS. RODRIGUEZ:

They're very generous.

LEG. KENNEDY:

You were going to tell us about be your wish list. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Mystal.

LEG. MYSTAL:

Just one question for you. Good morning, Ms. Rodriguez.

MS. RODRIGUEZ:

Good morning.

LEG. MYSTAL:

Do you have •• in your program for the homeless, do you a contingent or component in your program to permanently house those veteran's?

MS. RODRIGUEZ:

Our positive placement rate for the fiscal year '04/05 was 55%. Our positive placement rate for '03/04 was 59%. And '02 to '03 38%. Our Social Work Department works very diligently with sober housing, three quarter housing. We've gotten more involved with adult home placements because we're dealing with older veterans or veterans who have to be in an environment where their medication is maintained and their daily living skills. So we have expanded in those areas. There's, you know, there's only a certain pool that you could pull from. And unfortunately they're not always available or the veteran is not willing to •• if he serves connected pay \$600 dollars a month to stay there. You know, there's a lot of variables to that, but we work very hard. Our placement rates are very good. And it's a key •• a key component of the Social Work Department.

LEG. MYSTAL:

My second question, I know your population has a wide range in terms of age group ••

MS. RODRIGUEZ:

Yes.

LEG. MYSTAL:

•• but is your population mostly seniors would you say? Or close to seniors?

MS. RODRIGUEZ:

Right now we're seeing a turn around to a lot of young veterans. And a lot of middle•aged women. We do get the occasional World War II vet. I love them but they always give me a hard time. They always want to tell me what to do, but it's a great population. I would say middle•aged. I could look at that, I'm not •• men and women I know the age range.

LEG. MYSTAL:

My final question is and you mentioned that now three times that you have an increase in women veterans. Is there any special •• do you have any reason as to why that is that maybe we can attack or correct?

MS. RODRIGUEZ:

Well, a lot of the women veterans that we're serving right now have substance •• alcohol and substance abuse problems. A lot of their families have had it and will not engage with that veteran at this time.

LEG. MYSTAL:

Thank you.

MS. RODRIGUEZ:

You're welcome.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

We did want to hear your wish list, yes.

MS. RODRIGUEZ:

Okay, I also would like to leave with you •• I have a support letter here from Mr. Shuster from the VA hospital. And also one from the Department of Social Services. It gives some information about our program. So I have these support letters here for you.

Some of the things on our wish list is that we feel it would be vital to the veterans that we serve to have a computer lab. We do work with the Department of •• Department of Labor. We feel that veterans would be able to work on resumes, keep up with current events and develop some job skills. Because wherever you go now there's a computer and a lot of our veterans don't have the skills to work computers. I've had a couple of veterans volunteer to run a computer lab. If I had one who have retired and have time that would like to, you know, sponsor the training of the computer lab. So that would be one of the things that I feel that would increase the

veteran's ability to reintegrate back into the community even if it's to go to the library and do research and use a computer.

The other thing that we recognize as a need is financial assistance. Sometimes we get veterans who come to the shelter. They see the sign. We're on the grounds of the VA. And they have enough money from their check, service or non•service connected to get an apartment, but they don't have enough for the security. A dream of mine would be to have a fund that would be able to give one •• a one time financial assistance to put a veteran back into the community. Or if a veteran had a concern that this month they're \$75 or \$100 short to meeting their rent and paying their bills that they could get a one time gift and keep them in the community instead of pushing them towards homelessness again.

So that's something that I've been trying to brainstorm about /and I just wanted to put that out there. I think it's a very important component. I have a community advisory board which is composed of all veterans. The president of my community advisory board is retired captain, Patricia {Spraggins}, a Vietnam veteran. I've been discussing this with my community. If something like this were to happen, that the community advisory board would be the ones who would review the application and make the decision if this gift should be given; not the staff. It would be an outside entity. Captain {Spraggins} has been a very strong supporter of the Salvation Army since we opened. And she'll continue to do that. And I've been discussing that with her.

My other interest that I have is family reunification. I think it's vital to veterans to reunite with their families on some level. My dream would be to have pizza night once a month. And the veterans would be able to invite their families. A lot of them have children. It would be a safe environment where they can start rebuilding their relationships with their family. Right

now we have a stationery drive. I've received old greeting cards from different card companies and we provided stamps from a veteran organization so they could send their child a birthday card, or their mother a Mother's Day card just to try to start reconnecting these veterans to their families. So I would love to have like a pizza night once a month and invite families to the shelter and work on that.

We're in desperate need of washers and dryers. I have, actually, bids with me. We don't have the money in our budget to purchase them. Veterans are very kind. They buy a new washer and dryer, they bring it me and it breaks in month. You know, so to keep up with that. And basically that's my wish list. So I'll leave these letters ••

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good, I appreciate that.

MS. RODRIGUEZ:

•• from the County.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Deborah, thanks so much for being with us today.

MS. RODRIGUEZ:

It was very nice to be here, thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Thanks so much for coming. We do have another item on the agenda **Memorializing Resolution 44. Memorializing resolution in support of amending the Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage (EPIC) program.** Motion?

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Motion.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Motion approved by Legislator Eddington, second by Legislator Mystal. All in favor? All opposed? Abstentions? Very good. Motion is approved. Any other business? Motion to adjourn. Very good we are adjourned. Thank you everybody.

(THE MEETING ENDED AT 10:12 AM)

{ } DENOTES SPELLED PHONETICALLY