

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 October 2, 2007.

Members Present:

Legislator Steven H. Stern, Chairman
Legislator Jack Eddington, Vice-Chairman
Legislator Cameron Alden
Legislator Jon Cooper (not present)
Legislator Jay H. Schneiderman

Also In Attendance:

George Nolan, Counsel to the Legislature
Ian Barry, Assistant Counsel to the Legislature
Renee Ortiz, Chief Deputy Clerk
Verna Donnan, Budget Review Office
Deborah Harris, Aide to Legislator Stern
Holly Rhodes-Teague, Director/Office for the Aging
Tom Ronayne, Director of Veterans Service Agency/Human Services Div.
Paul Perillie, Aide to Majority Leader
Debra Alloncius, AME Legislative Director
Ira Bernstein, Brookhaven Senior Advisory
Joanne Cipriani, Brookhaven Senior Advisory
George Roach, Legal Aid Society/Senior Citizens Division
All Other Interested Parties

Minutes Taken By:

Diana Kraus - Court Stenographer

Minutes Transcribed By:

Denise Weaver - Legislative Aide

(THE MEETING COMMENCED AT 1:13 PM)

CHAIRMAN STERN:

I ask everybody to please rise for the Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator Alden.

SALUTATION

I ask everybody to please remain standing as we consider and keep in our thoughts and prayers all of our very brave men and women fighting for our freedoms overseas.

MOMENT OF SILENCE OBSERVED

Thank you. George? George, welcome.

PUBLIC PORTION

MR. ROACH:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, may I proceed?

LEG. ALDEN:

Sure.

MR. ROACH:

Thank you. For those of you who don't know who I am, for the record, my name is George Roach, R-o-a-c-h. For the past 28 years I worked for the Legal Aid Society. I am the Chief Attorney for the Legal Aid Society Senior Citizen Division and hope to be Chairman at least into the near future if we can get some funding. And that's really what I'm here today to sort of lay the groundwork. But for the fact that the attorney in charge of the entire Legal Aid Society, Mr. Mitchell, is having some medical tests today, he would be here with me. And we will be back for a more formal presentation before this committee with the exact facts and figures.

But as you know the County Executive has come out with his budget. And in that budget, zero increase for us. We're at -- we got rolled back from -- presently it's 218,000 is what he's giving us this year to run the program. Taking away all of the funding that this Committee was instrumental in putting back last year to get everybody under the senior citizens budget and get them out of the general budget, if you remember, we were here last year. And, of course, that starts this tango going on.

So I would like to apprise the Committee that based on the County Executive's budget, what he gave us this year, he's cut about \$357,000 from the Senior Citizens Program. As you know we provide the legal advice, counseling and representation to the over 250,000 people that reside here in Suffolk County that are at least 60 years of age or older. You just pick up the paper, as you know, everyday there's articles on foreclosure whether it's the subprime market or not. And it's going to be hitting the Senior Citizens Division -- hitting the senior citizens of this County in the near future. And we just can't afford to lose people anymore.

So I just want to -- I'm here briefly to just lay the groundwork and say that we will be back looking to ask this Legislature again to consider this program, not only the Senior Citizens Division but also the funding to the Legal Aid Society in and of itself to restore that funding in your deliberations.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

All right. Thanks, George. Quick question for Budget Review, Verna. Can you take us back to last year what the recommended number was and what the amount of the funding that we had restored was and where we finally came down as of last year?

MS. DONNAN:

Okay. One second. I'm pulling it up. Okay?

CHAIRMAN STERN:

While we have just a moment, let me say and it's actually with great pleasure that I say on the record that during the course of the several public hearings that we had as a part of the Countywide Senior Citizens Task force, so many seniors and their families came forward to give testimony and talk about their personal stories on how instrumental you and your staff were to helping them, you know, with some very critical problems at a, you know, vulnerable time in their lives. So outstanding work as always.

MR. ROACH:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MS. DONNAN:

I'm sorry. I'm bringing up last year's information. It's -- just take a minute. Okay, we're almost there.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

While we're waiting for that information so we can get an answer to the question, we'll go into the agenda. Introductory resolution, we have one before us today.

INTRODUCTORY RESOLUTIONS

IR 1935, Accepting and appropriating 100% reimbursable funds for the AAA

Transportation Program. (Co. Exec. Levy) I'll make a motion to approve and to place on the consent calendar.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Second.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Second by Legislator Schneiderman. All in favor? Any opposed? Any abstentions? Motion passes.
(VOTE: 4-0-0-1. Not Present: Legislator Cooper)

MS. DONNAN:

Okay. So last year the Legal Aid Society their request was for 501,161 and it was recommended -- it was requested at 217,696 and the recommended budget gave \$435 more than that. We gave -- the Legislators gave 314,000 more in the omnibus.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

What did the omnibus recommend again? I mean what did the budget recommend, the County Executive?

CHAIRMAN STERN:

217,000.

MS. DONNAN:

A little over 218,000.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

218. And then we add an additional 314.

MS. DONNAN:

Yes.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

So the total was --

MS. DONNAN:

Yes.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

-- 532 something.

MS. DONNAN:

I have that, one moment. The adopted amount was 532,131 for 2007.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

For 2007. And what's the recommended '08?

MS. DONNAN:

218,131.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

So it's about -- basically it's about the same.

MS. DONNAN:

They're right where they were.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Right where they were last year.

MS. DONNAN:

Yes.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Okay.

MS. DONNAN:

We have a request from the Legal Aid Society for 576,034. That went to the Office of the Aging. That's not the Office of the Aging's request for the budget but that was the Legal Aid's request to them.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

So that's about another 358,000 that they're looking for versus last year's 314,000?

MS. DONNAN:

No. Last year was 532.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

No, no in terms of the additional funds above what was recommended last year.

MS. DONNAN:

Oh.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

They got an extra 314.

MS. DONNAN:

Yeah.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

This year they're asking for an extra 355. I'm not sure the 314 is what they asked for. They may have asked for more at that point too.

MS. DONNAN:

Last year --

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

I only know what they got.

MS. DONNAN:

What they requested last year was -- one moment. Their request -- the Legal Aid Society requested of the Office of the Aging 501,161.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

And they actually got 532? They got more than they asked for? That doesn't usually happen around here.

MS. DONNAN:

Yeah, but it did.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Well, maybe you need to ask for less.

LEG. ALDEN:

There was an explanation on that, too.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Alden.

LEG. ALDEN:

When we did the budget last year everyone was told to cut it by at least ten percent; to cut their request by ten percent. So basically if you add that in then you get to almost the right number. So there was a -- there was pressure put on every department to put in budgets with cuts, not really what they wanted or what was needed to run the department.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Eddington.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Just for clarification, when I hear too many numbers it all gets fuzzy.

MS. DONNAN:

Yeah.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

They asked for an amount. And it was recommended and we -- another amount. And then we finally did 314,000 more that brought it up to closer to what they had recommended; actually a little more. And did you say that but they didn't get the addition that we gave?

MS. DONNAN:

No, they did.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:
They got it.

LEG. EDDINGTON:
Oh, they did. Okay.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:
They got it.

LEG. EDDINGTON:
They did, okay. All right. I thought --

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:
So now we're -- this is like déjà vu.

LEG. EDDINGTON:
Right. We're going over the same --

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:
It's the same conversation as a year ago.

MS. DONNAN:
Yeah.

LEG. EDDINGTON:
Right. Okay. And that's what I was basically going to ask.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
However, my question would be, and George, we certainly don't need to go in too much depth today, especially since you said Bob perhaps is going to be coming back, but I would like maybe some kind of clarification as to the difference between the \$576,000 that's requested for '08 where the difference comes from the \$501,000 that was requested in 2007. Now, I understand where Legislator Alden is coming from in the comments that he had made. But still the request was for 501,000. We'd certainly like to see where that difference comes from.

MR. ROACH:
And we will be back with not only Mr. Mitchell but Mr. O'Reilly who's our Budget Analyst and Mr. Duffy. And we'll have that information for you; okay? And we'll have it in the package and handouts and you'll have it.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:
Was all the money used last year that we provided?

MR. ROACH:
It's all used. That funding was used to take people who actually do senior citizen work and move them from the general budget into a senior citizens budget. So we're not paying people out of general. If you remember that's --

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:
Right.

MR. ROACH:
-- that was our problem last year. You can't keep paying people out of one budget and another and -- that's the kind of thing you get in trouble for. So very simply we try to move people over. This

Legislature provided the additional funding to put the five people under the senior citizens umbrella. Now we don't have the funding for those five people anymore --

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Right.

MR. ROACH:

-- based on 218.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

And those five people, that's your 300,000 basically?

MR. ROACH:

That's it.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

And so these are five attorneys?

MR. ROACH:

No. Actually there's only two-and-a-half attorneys and two paralegal/secretaries. There's two attorneys and a part-time lawyer to cover the over 250,000 people that are out here that can take advantage of this program.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

How many people actually do take advantage of it?

MR. ROACH:

Our numbers last year, I think, we had over 4,000 contacts if I remember correctly, either by phone call, advice, counsel and/or representation. The problem is when people need representation and extensive litigation. As the Chairman knows, a simple foreclosure action took two-and-a-half of us roughly a solid two months to avoid a foreclosure on a particular case because it involves going to court, the litigation, the pleadings so it's --

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

How do they you find out about your organization? Is it something that the judge tells them about it?

MR. ROACH:

Okay. One of our mandates, and it's one of the things I do, one of our mandates is public outreach.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Okay.

MR. ROACH:

So I go out into the community to the public libraries, the senior citizen clubs of the various towns. And I tell them about the program and the type of service we provide and a little bit about what they should be doing.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

And it's entirely free or is it sliding scale?

MR. ROACH:

Entirely free because the funding for this program from Congress primarily under the Older Americans Act. And that's a mandated service simply -- solely by virtue of their age. The only requirements --

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Is it --

MR. ROACH:

-- are that they be 60 years of age and live here in Suffolk County.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

There's no income requirement?

MR. ROACH:

None whatsoever.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Okay.

MR. ROACH:

Okay.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Alden.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Can I just -- I just want one more question. In terms of Legal Aid, too, but this -- the 500,000 you had this year that all went to senior legal aid?

MR. ROACH:

Yes. All went to senior citizens. Has nothing to do with the general legal aid budget.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Okay. And how much is the general legal aid budget?

MR. ROACH:

That's about a \$10 million number if I -- you know, I'm not that budget guy but I think that's the number that we use. It's about ten million.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

And where does that money come from? Is that also County? Or --

MR. ROACH:

That comes from the County. I believe the -- yeah, because the County has an obligation -- see I'm the only attorney left in Legal Aid that does any civil work.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

It's mandated, right?

MR. ROACH:

Right. Now you have the indigent defense. The County has an obligation to provide --

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

These are your public defenders, yes?

MR. ROACH:

-- people charged with crimes. And that's the big budget.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Okay. And we're mandated by the state to provide that?

MR. ROACH:

Yes.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Alden.

LEG. ALDEN:

And if you remember last year there was a debate whether we funded through the 18-B, which is a court appointed attorney or if we funded through the more economically feasible Public Defender's Office. So I'm just going to guess here but I'm going to think that the Public Defender's Office was probably hacked and slashed to the tune of about a half a million dollars also in the proposed budget. So we're going to be looking at both those issues. But George is here just addressing us on the senior citizen side of that budget.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

George, thanks.

MR. ROACH:

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee. Have a pleasant day. Thank you.

LEG. ALDEN:

Thanks, George.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Ira.

MR. BERNSTEIN:

Good afternoon everybody. I'm Ira Bernstein. I'm with the Brookhaven Senior Advisory. Although my role has increased to helping many seniors throughout Suffolk County since I visited many towns and been to their centers and looked at some of the main issues that seniors have faced as we get into the, really the major problems that are happening in Long Island.

So and I want to thank Legislator Stern, Legislator Alden and Legislator Schneiderman and Eddington for listening to some of the issues that I brought up. And some of them may be new today but some -- we'll review some of the issues that seniors have come to me over the last year I've been involved in this capacity.

All right. Let me first start with something that relates to what I feel is a problem between County and state government. Back in May, and I appeared on a News 12 show talking about the STAR extended credits that were going to come back to Suffolk County residents this month either late September and early October. Unfortunately, the bill that was presented there was tabled. Originally my figures, which you can check in the state budget, there was a \$300 million excess money collected in taxes of which \$30 million were earmarked to go to rebates for the extended STAR Program to seniors. For those of you not familiar with the extended STAR Program, you have to be over age 65 and a certain income level. I believe we had stated it at around 68,000. That amount of money, which is desperately needed by many of our seniors in Suffolk County has not arrived.

So one of the questions I have for this Committee is there anything else we can do, which we were told the average rebate would be about \$381 for Suffolk. I think it was something like 260 for Nassau. And that's an issue that many seniors are questioning me on because they were hoping to get that. And that's not part of the thing you've seen in the mail with the STAR rebate, the regular STAR Program. So that's one issue I hope, you know, we can discuss and see if there's anything else that we can do.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Did some seniors get it? Or did nobody get the --

MR. BERNSTEIN:

Nobody's gotten it yet because according to the Governor, they're very concerned I guess, with the bond ratings and the money that has to be left in reserve for the state. So my figures, if they are still correct, over \$300 million is sitting there. And according to the figures we had the 30 million would not make a major dent in that reserve and it's still not coming to residents of Suffolk County.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

But they're obligated to deliver that money.

MR. BERNSTEIN:

Yes.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Oh.

MR. BERNSTEIN:

That was passed already by it's --

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

All right. So they just might be holding onto it so it can earn interest before they release it or something like that?

MR. BERNSTEIN:

I hope that's correct. But they were told originally this is coming in September or the latest October. And we've seen no evidence of it. And this is not something they have to --

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

And have they told you on the state level --

MR. BERNSTEIN:

No.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

-- what is going on?

MR. BERNSTEIN:

No. And not only that -- no. And it's supposed to just come. They don't have to fill out any forms like we do with the regular STAR Program, which you've seen in the mail. So that's an issue which people have brought to me and I thought I would mention today.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Thank you.

MR. BERNSTEIN:

Sure. The other issue we were talking about that Steven mentioned, Legislator Stern, at the Task Force is how to coordinate services among the different towns for transportation. And one of the difficulties we face right now if a person in the Town of Brookhaven wants to come to Islip, there's a hospital there. It's hard to make the arrangements time wise. There is a Suffolk County bus service and I know that's available. But sometimes the medical needs are past a certain point of day where that service can't be coordinated. And I'm hoping one of the things we do with the Task Force is coordinate the towns so we can do that. And that's an issue with -- many seniors have brought up.

The other issue is housing. Housing is still a major problem. I have many people that call me,

looking to get into Section 8 housing. There's a long waiting list. And we had an incident with one lady that had to, I guess, live in a car for a few months. She finally was able to get a voucher but still no home. So I think one of the things I hope the Legislature does in its next session is address some issues, the housing for seniors because there are many people just really living in very poor conditions or living almost in a homeless state and they really need some help to get them, you know, to a good standard of life. And that's a concern for us.

The other thing which I think is important, which people have come to -- relatives of people in nursing homes, you probably have all seen that there's been a scare now with this Legionnaire disease happening in many nursing homes. And part of, I think, is we need to develop a stricter code of help for the seniors. You know, my experience has not been good with these. There are some that are very well run, but others I think are questionable in terms of the staff they had. There's an issue with medication. I used to work with Brookhaven on the Helpline and we found a lot of people that were not taking their normal medication and needed certain things. Some of them are taking the wrong medication. And I just think maybe as a County if we can have some meeting with some of the supervisor people and the other towns we can probably address that issue.

So there's a lot of things that I feel would like to work on but, you know, we need the help of the committee. And I think Legislator Stern did that; took a good step with the Task Force. But we need to really get it out to the community and know that we can help them.

One other thing that was brought to my attention since this is the Veterans Committee too, we have a member of our Brookhaven Senior Advisory, Joan Cipriani, who brought me a message about veterans benefits and what happens when the veteran dies, how the spouses can avail themselves of the benefits. And there's not enough coordination to get those benefits out. And a lot of them have to sit in very poor conditions for a longtime.

So I'm hoping at some point we can address that and make some big moves. Because as Legislator Stern has said, the population is increasing and they're not moving to Florida. The prices of things are just so expensive that many people are electing to stay here in Suffolk County. And unless we really have a plan and develop it, we're going to fall behind the needs of the thousands of seniors who are out there needing our help.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Ira, thank you.

MR. BERNSTEIN:

Okay. Thank you, Steve.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Alden.

LEG. ALDEN:

Is your committee still in existence or did it --

CHAIRMAN STERN:

We are. And we have the draft of our report being typed up now actually as we speak.

LEG. ALDEN:

Good because some of the issues that were just raised, some of them actually are state coordinated.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Yes.

LEG. ALDEN:

But like the one with the transportation every town has a restriction or most of them have restrictions sending the vans outside their geographic boundaries.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

It was a -- access to public transportation whether it's at the County level or the towns or even that mode of transportation that might be provided by a private company was a subject that was discussed at great length during our public hearings. Not just through those professionals that have experience with it but more importantly was brought up by seniors and the disabled themselves during our public hearings. And so certainly one of the major points of conversation will be reflected in the report. Legislator Schneiderman.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Steve, yeah I'm just thinking on the issue of the extended STAR Program and what if anything we can do. I'm thinking maybe you can pen a letter as Chair of the Committee on behalf of the Committee to the state agency that would be involved, at least launching an inquiry into, you know, where these checks are and when seniors might expect them.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Good idea. And it's something that I was toying with as well. I was probably going to give it just a couple more days because as I've been out and about within my district, and speaking with a lot of people as I go door to door, it's an issue that they brought up with me as well. But they've also said that they have contacted their State Senator's Office who have been responsive at least with an answer and to let them know that it should be forthcoming within the next few days. So will it happen?

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Okay.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

We hope so. But that's the initial word back from our State Senators. And if it isn't then certainly we should --

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Okay.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

-- forward our concern.

LEG. ALDEN:

You don't want to do a sense resolution, God forbid.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Is there anybody else that would like to address the Committee as part of public portion? Okay. Seeing none, Tom.

PRESENTATIONS

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Good afternoon, Chairman, members, thank you again for inviting me. I don't have a great deal to report on today; that is not to suggest that we're not very busy and that everybody is not out there doing a good job.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

That's fine.

LEG. ALDEN:

Because we'll cut you ten percent.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Is there a second? God forbid. One of the things that has been occurring in the community, and I know that we've discussed this many times, is the coordination and the sharing of the information regarding units within Suffolk County who are being mobilized, activated, deploying and so forth. And as I've -- we are now aware, and I attended along with Legislator Eddington, a family pre-deployment event that was hosted at the first of the 69th, the Fighting 69th at the Bay Shore Armory. They, in fact, are preparing to redeploy. They'll be going back to Iraq this time -- I'm sorry -- to Afghanistan, late December early January.

So we are working with them. We are liaising with the family support group, which is very active in the 69th. They're fortunate to have the folks as active as they are. So I just wanted to report on that and make you aware that that unit is heading out. And the composition of the unit has nothing to do with the Armory necessarily that they're operating out of. Their soldiers come from all corners. They come from New York City, Upstate New York, certainly all throughout Nassau and Suffolk Counties; entirely possible that there are members within some of your districts, just to be aware.

That being said I'll give Legislator Eddington a plug. Backing up and following up on the pre-deployment program, Legislator Eddington is hosting his own veterans benefit seminar tomorrow. That will be held at the Medford firehouse, Medford fire headquarters from three to seven. My office will have two representatives in attendance to provide counsel and benefit information to anybody who would like it.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Was that set up through your office?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

No. That was set up by the Legislator's office. We were informed of it and invited to attend. And we happily accepted that invitation but that's Legislator Eddington's program, not ours.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Just to add that, you know, the Vietnam era veterans have always complained that no one ever welcomed them home. And this was the incentive to make sure that everybody knows that they're welcomed home and the families are -- can get assistance while they are deployed, when they come back. It's just an attempt. And what I'm going to do is once this works, and I see how it does, I'm going to give the information, how we set it up to first with us and then to the other Legislators so we can do it -- have a model of how to do this right.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Sounds great.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Excellent.

LEG. ALDEN:

Good. Yeah, it's not just a east and west end thing.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Stop it. No, it sounds like a good idea that I would, you know, wouldn't mind borrowing for my own district. So once you get it all worked out, let me know.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

One more thing to report on is we have already begun actively planning our next Homeless Veterans Stand-down. The date for that will be April 11th of next year. It may sound like it's a long way off but for planning purposes it is not.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

You'll remind us of it again at some point.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Count on it Legislator.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Okay. Thank you.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

That will be April 11th. And I'd just like to report that we have now submitted our federal grant request for the Homeless Veterans Stand-down -- the Homeless Veterans Integration Program. There are grant opportunities available. I've applied for a \$7000 offset grant to host the next stand-down. We were able to pull the last one off very successfully, I would add, at no cost to the County for this year. Certainly if we had a \$7000 account to draw upon, we could just do that much better of a job. So I'll keep you apprised of the status of the grant as well.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And, Tom, approximately how many attended and took advantage of this program?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

The Stand-down we served -- 83, I think, was the final number. We served 83 veterans. We had about 165 volunteers and representatives from 33 agencies on the state and federal and local level. I can tell you that a couple of veterans that attended the Stand-down have contacted us subsequent to the Stand-down. And they -- whether they found housing -- one gentleman came out of the event that day with a job. So it absolutely bore some fruit. We had people that we're still hearing from who are still benefiting from the things that they were exposed to that day.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

We had -- last year we did for the first time, we sort of reconstructed the event that the County Executive hosts when he pays honor to the fallen sons of Suffolk County by presenting the Suffolk County medal of military distinction -- distinguished military service to the Gold Star families; the parents or the spouse of anybody who is killed in combat. Last year we combined the presentation of the Gold Star medals, the medals to the Gold Star families with an award ceremony where the County Executive acknowledged specific veterans from within the veterans communities for various things. And I'm happy to tell you that we have now hosted our second annual event that we'll be doing that. We'll be doing Gold Star medals -- medals to the Gold Star families and awards to select veterans. That will be October 23rd from six PM to 8 PM. And it will be at the Half Hollow Hills School District High School East. The event will be hosted in the auditorium -- in the lecture hall versus their auditorium. But again, that's October 23rd from 6 to 8. And I would extend an invitation to each of you if you were able to attend to certainly join us and honor these very deserving people.

We fortunately have not had many KIA's this year. We right now I believe we're only honoring two, which, you know, we certainly wish that number was zero, but the number is smaller than it has been previously. We do however have a recently injured -- severely injured soldier from the Commack area -- actually East Northport. He was wounded in an improvised explosive device attack and his left leg was amputated. He's at Walter Reed. He'll be going through some therapy but he'll be coming back into the community; and just to keep a real face on it. These people are still being

injured.

The various veterans service organizations, the AMVETS, the American Legion and so forth have again joined forces. And they're hosting a Support the Troops Rally that will be held at Armed Forces Plaza at the Dennison Building, Saturday November 3rd. And the planned time is 11 to 3; 11 AM to 3 PM. Not sure at this time what they're doing in terms of speakers, if they're inviting speakers to participate or not. Again the organizations are hosting this versus our office.

And finally I just wanted to make anybody aware who was not yet already aware that the governor recently signed an expansion of the Veterans Real Property Tax Exemption Law, which I imagine will be coming down the pike to this body at some point; expanding the real property tax benefit to Cold War veterans. So now instead of it being just wartime veterans, combat veterans and service connected disabled veterans, it effectively catches anybody who served in uniform for one year and received an honorable discharge from 1945 to 1991. It's a slightly smaller benefit than the wartime and the combat veterans receive. It's ten percent of the real property tax -- the adjusted real property tax adjusted for schools, but represents a lot of people. So when that -- won't be a surprise when it comes down. And that is all that I have at this time. I'd be happy to take any questions.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Schneiderman.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Yes. Just quickly, as you know I'm a child of a World War II vet and North Korea vet who found himself in the hospital this past week. And he just got discharged yesterday into rehab. And, you know, while he was sitting in the hospital during the times that I couldn't visit him, I was, you know, wondering if there's any program, you know, through your organization or any other organization, you know, where maybe other vets could visit or send a card or a basket. I wasn't so much thinking about my father but of all the vets who end up alone in a hospital somewhere. It just seems like there ought to be some organization reaching out saying you're not alone.

LEG. ALDEN:

I can answer it.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

You're not forgotten.

LEG. ALDEN:

When my mother was alive she was the President of the Ladies Auxiliary for the American Legion in Suffolk County. And that's one of the big things they do is outreach. If a vet's in the hospital, they go and visit him. Plus through churches there's a lot of churches that do an outreach program especially for vets.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

So the answer is, I should then call the local American Legion?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Yeah.

LEG. ALDEN:

And they'll give you the Auxiliary.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Okay, the ladies.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

In fact, in response to your question it's not so much a question of are there any. The answer is really all of the veteran service organizations, the VFW, the AMVETS and all of their Ladies Auxiliaries --

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Right.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

-- do have components where they go several times a month. Largely they focus for obvious reasons I think on Northport and on the veterans nursing home in Stony Brook. But, yeah, if you --

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Well he's going to be in rehab probably for at least three weeks. So I probably should call my local American Legion and let them know.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Call your local American Legion Hall, VFW Hall. And their service officer should be more than happy to send a card out and if you ask for a --

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Okay.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

-- veteran and -- generally what we try to do is pair the era. So if it's a World War II veteran, if we're able, we'd send a World War II veteran to spend some time with them and, you know, they have some commonality in their experiences.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

All right, thank you.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Tom, thank you. Holly.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Well, you already voted on what I was going to ask you to support so I thank you for your support on the 100% reimbursable funding. The funding is coming down from the state. And we will be using it to expand our services for essential transportation, which is funding that's going to each of our contractors who wanted the funding actually to provide more doctors appointments and more appointments to go to the grocery store, things like that. So it's not so much going to the nutrition sites but to some of the other things that they need to do. So I think the contractors are getting about 11, \$12,000 a piece to try to put more services into place. So, you know, that's good news for us.

The other thing I know you talked about, towns crossing lines. I know Legislator Stern knows about this but there is a pilot that's going to be done with the Town of Southampton, the Town of East Hampton. And they're looking to kind of piggyback on each others trips to Stony Brook University as a pilot to see how well that works over the next several months. They just started advertising that they're doing that. And hopefully that will be a good pilot. And some of the other towns can replicate it so that they can not waste as much time driving, you know, driving to Stony Brook to bring, you know, one person, you know, they might be able to take several people and save the drivers from the other towns from having to do the same trip in the same day.

So, you know, there is some work being done to try to get people to move forward on doing more

transportation with the same funds or maybe a little bit more. But, you know, we're working on it. So is there anything else I can help you with?

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Anything else?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

No? Our public hearing that I'm required to do for the -- the state requires us to do a public hearing on our services every year for our annual plan. That's being held November 1st in the plaza of the H. Lee Dennison Building. And it will be held at 10:30 in the morning. So just so you know we'll be sending out notices to all the Legislators.

LEG. ALDEN:

You're up for HEAP.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

I'm sorry, what about HEAP?

LEG. ALDEN:

You're up.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

HEAP is a -- you know we've already gotten the applications coming in because the state does one mailout now. And the mailout was done in August. I don't believe the season starts until the end of this week. Though the applications are being processed, you know, I think they couldn't actually go in for certification until this week or next week so we're working on them. We already have somewhere around, I don't know, 2500 applications in.

LEG. ALDEN:

There's two components right to HEAP? There's -- we give money from state, right and federal grants?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Right. The federal money.

LEG. ALDEN:

And then is there a component from our part of the budget?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

You know, honestly I'm a subcontractor to DSS for the HEAP Program. And we provide the services to the elderly. I know you had the, what was it called, if we were HEAP they were SHEAP?

LEG. ALDEN:

Okay. So DSS --

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

The SHEAP Program. DSS is --

LEG. ALDEN:

-- so they'll present for this budget cycle cause we want to make sure that we're fully funded.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

I don't know what DSS has put into the budget for SHEAP.

LEG. ALDEN:

Okay.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

I know you had that program last year and the year before. I don't know -- I haven't heard what's going on with it yet this year.

LEG. ALDEN:

Okay. Thanks.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

But that's a DSS one.

LEG. ALDEN:

Thank you.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Thanks, Holly. Anybody else? Anybody else? Tom.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

If I could, I just wanted to mention that the last time I reported I told you that the Honor Flight, the trip taking the World War II veterans to Washington was meeting a mediocre response. Effective as of this morning, I spoke to them this morning, the 57 seats are now full and they are one-third booked for their next flight. So something happened somewhere the word got out and it did catch up. They're a little bit lean on volunteers, the escort volunteers. So if anybody is interested, they're looking for those. But the World War II veterans are apparently starting to hear about this program.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Can I ask you a question about that program again too? In terms of access for the disabled on these flights, is it wheelchair accessibility? Is everything available?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Yes.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Okay.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Yes. And just to piggyback on that they match their volunteers and the people from the program that travel with each of these groups so that there's always -- I think they told me there's always a physician and at least an EMT or a paramedic with them to care for all of the veterans who may have a need. But the -- as long as they're ambulatory to the point where they can be put in a chair and gotten around, they are welcome.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

And what's the contact number again?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

The gentleman's name is Chris Cosich. And he is not in my cell phone.

MS. HARRIS:

I have it. Hang on. It's 917 579-5001.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Tom, thanks. Any other business? Any other business? Motion to adjourn.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Second.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Second by the Vice-Chairman. We are adjourned.

**(THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 1:55 PM)
{ } DENOTES SPELLED PHONETICALLY**