

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 7, 2008.

Members Present:

Leg. Steven H. Stern, Chairman
Leg. Jack Eddington, Vice-Chair
Leg. Ricardo Montano (not present)
Leg. John M. Kennedy, Jr.
Leg. Edward P. Romaine

Also In Attendance:

William J. Lindsay, Presiding Officer
Leg. Kate M. Browning, Third District
George Nolan, Counsel to the Legislature
Renee Ortiz, Chief Deputy Clerk
Kevin Duffy, 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.
Greg Curran, Department of Veterans Affairs
Paul Perillie, Aide to Majority Leader
Debra Alloncius, AME Legislative Director
Justin Littell, Aide to Leg. D'Amaro
Paul Arfin, Intergenerational Strategies
Ron Roel, Intergenerational Strategies
Bob Mitchell, Legal Aid
Lou Mazzola, Legal Aid
Philip J. O' Reilly, Legal Aid
All Other Interested Parties

Minutes Taken By:

Diana Kraus - Court Stenographer

THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 1:51 PM

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Okay. Welcome to the Veterans and Seniors Committee meeting. I'm going to ask everybody to please rise and join us in the Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator Romaine.

SALUTATION

I ask everybody to please remain standing and join us in a moment of silence as we keep all of our brave men and women fighting for our freedoms overseas in our thoughts and prayers.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

Thank you. Welcome everybody.

We have a few presentations this afternoon. I apologize for the late start. We'll try to get through our agenda expeditiously this afternoon.

Before we go to presentations, I will ask our Director of Veteran Services Tom Ronanye to come up and join us.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Good afternoon, Chairman.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Good afternoon.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Thank you once again to appear before you. My report today -- my report today, if you'll allow, I'll make fairly brief because we do have with us today Mr. Curran from the Department of Veterans Affairs, who is the coordinator of homeless veteran programs. He was planning on making a report that I think would be very inclusive of some of the things that I was going to discuss.

I will say to you that we are continuing to be very busy in the agency. We're seeing a larger number of OIF/OEF Iraq and Afghanistan veterans than we had been in the previous year or so. So we're hoping that the result of the programs and the services and the outreach are beginning to bear fruit. And the awareness is beginning to improve amongst the returning veterans.

We continue to work closely with our units based here on Long Island, both those who are at home with us now and those who are deployed. I met on Friday of last week with Colonel Candors who is the wing commander of the 106th Air Rescue Wing in Westhampton. I've spoken as recently as this morning with the coordinator of the family readiness group for the Fighting 69th. So we're maintaining a presence in the community. We're, you know, continuing to communicate with the entities in the military and veteran community out there.

And, again, all is well in terms of -- pardon my cough -- providing services and continuing to try and do the best that we are able to provide services to our soldiers, our veterans and their families.

On a not-so-pleasant note, I'll report to you, and this has not -- it's not time sensitive any longer.

It's appeared in some press but it has not been formally released by DOD, but we have had another casualty. We've had another line of duty death from the Fighting 69th, a soldier serving in Afghanistan. I'll keep the members apprised of the details as we receive them with regard to the return of the remains and any services that may be conducted.

I am told, however, that as we have seen on the last several instances, the body is expected to be returned to MacArthur Airport. As I reported on which for a number of reasons we're very pleased -- we obviously would wish that we never had a soldier coming back. The reality of it is that we are and that we do. And it allows us to do a much better job of caring for the family and paying the appropriate respects and services to the returning soldier.

So with that I'll be happy to take any questions.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Thank you. Legislator Eddington.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Yes. Are you aware of the initiative that I've been working with the family readiness group from the Fighting 69th? I don't know if --

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I believe so. With the food pantry and the extension of services?

LEG. EDDINGTON:

We did the food collection but now we're talking about getting things together for the servicemen on their off time, like New York jerseys, you know, stuff like that.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I'd actually spoken to Beth {Delapesi} about that.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Okay, good, because I'm working with her so I'm hoping that you'd be able to jump on board and we can maybe drum it up a little bit so that when they have off time, they can watch a football game, have a, you know, a Giant or a Jet jersey, some stuff that they can't buy over there to relax.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Remarkably enough two of the things that we're hearing most often that they're asking for are DVD players and video games. It used to be footballs and frisbees; now it's video games.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Yeah. I have another question. Can you confirm a report that there's been a contract signed between Suffolk County and Tricare, a federal health care provider, to bring our returning Long Island wounded veterans back from Walter Reed to the John J. Foley Center?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I've heard one anecdotal report on that. I'm not briefed on it. I do not have any knowledge of any such agreement, whether it's in place or not so I couldn't speak on it.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

I'm wondering, Mr. Chairman, I see Debra Alloncius from AME. And I think they are part of the contract. Could I get some information from her if it's possible?

CHAIRMAN STERN:

If she'd like to share that with us. I know that in speaking with her as she should be very proud of the progress that she and the organization have been able to make, if she has some information for us, absolutely.

MS. ALLONCIUS:

Yes, I would absolutely love to share the information with you, especially with you, Mr. Eddington, being a veteran.

AME on an idea I had in trying to come about with the revenue source for J. J. Foley, approached Congressman Bishop two months ago about getting a -- getting our Iraqi war vets, Afghanistan vets, any vets who had traumatic brain injury or spinal cord injury or needing rehabilitation that could very well be done in the state of the art facility here that our County Exec wants to sell. You are effective 10-1-08 a full provider in Tricare.

In 45 days we managed to get this contract signed, sealed and delivered into Suffolk County. You are now able to. You will be able to be seen on the network effective probably tomorrow from what I understand from my contact up at Tricare at West Point, that it takes a -- it takes a couple of days and we're going to input it on Monday and it should be up by Wednesday, all the data that's available. It will be able to be read on all the bases, at all the hospitals. You're a full provider in that contract.

I do understand that we really need to work -- try to get some numbers for you. I will be -- we'll be attempting to do that. I wanted to get a hold of my contact, {An Videl} yesterday. He was in the field. And, of course, I've been sitting here all day today. But we do understand that this could be a win/win for everybody; a win for my veterans, a win for my nursing home members who were working so hard to make a wonderful life for these people out there, for the people who are going to be dispersed to the wind when that place is sold, if and when the County Exec has his druthers to get rid of an asset that belongs to the County and the taxpayers of Suffolk County.

But most of all it will be a win for you guys to keep your veterans here, to bring them back, to let them be rehabbed right here in Suffolk County with their families, with their members. Everybody that -- their closed circuit, their friends, etcetera. What's part of the healing process is the whole psyche, the whole -- everything going down in your head, everything that's going on. When you have that, and you have the care that those people show out there, and for you who have been out there, who have experienced the care that my members give to the veterans that are out there now and the non-veterans, you'll see that this place is home to many people. I want to make it home to those spinal cord injured men who can't get around, and women. Traumatic brain injury requires lot of care.

Why I look to these is because they bring up the numbers in the case picks indicator. They bring up the reimbursement rates. Veterans, you know, they have the -- the whole new funding stream. And I hope to God that somebody takes this and runs with it because we put a lot of work into this. But I need you. I need this Legislature behind me. And I'm sorry to see Mr. D'Amaro leave the room because I would like him to have heard what I had to say.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Well, I can at least say for myself as a veteran and a member of this Committee that I applaud your initiative.

MS. ALLONCIUS:

Well, I thank you; I really do.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

And anything we can do to bring our men and women back home for care, I mean, we heard of two or three years ago the atrocious places -- they were being put in motels behind Walter Reed. This is -- this makes me really feel good so I appreciate all your efforts.

MS. ALLONCIUS:

I thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Kennedy.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Like Legislator Eddington I want to commend you. I know first hand the efforts that you've employed. And the real willingness to go ahead and set to a task at hand on the behalf of Congressman Bishop's office.

Tom, I'm going to ask you to talk to us a little bit about this regarding that process for our injured young men and women as they're coming back from the theatre of war. How will we be able to go ahead and help move some of them over to John J?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

To be entirely honest with you, I'm not briefed or versed in this program. I don't know what the agreement says or doesn't say. So without having any knowledge of the agreement, I don't think that I can intelligently speak on it.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Okay. Well, then what I'd ask in the alternative is, is how about our contacts over at Northport? Who should we be speaking with? Our Director over there?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Unfortunately they are now in the situation of having a new interim director. Director {Culaton} has moved on.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Oh, he has?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Recently. And in the last several days we have had an interim director appointed. We do not know what the term of his stay will be before a permanent director is appointed so we're back in that situation.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Well, who is the interim director, Tom?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I only learned his name a few moments ago. Greg?

MR. CURRAN:

Steve Young.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Steve Young.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Steve Young?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Yeah.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Okay. Through the Chair, actually if you would, Tom, since you got so much of the background and knowledge and expertise here, I'm going to ask if you would initiate some contact there now that

we're aware that this in fact actually has been executed, Tricare is fully in place, on board. We can go ahead and move things quickly rather than having multiple Legislators making this contact, you know. With the leave of Legislator Stern I'm going to ask that you go ahead and do some of that detail work and share back with us.

Every one of us has young veterans in our districts who are struggling with the range of physical and psychological maladies. I could sit here and tell you about Justin {Zwalick} who went to school with my -- one of my children, who I emailed for the better part of six months as he was over in the war theatre zone and then recovering in Hawaii. And only when he came back to Nesconset did I become aware of the full extent of the injuries that this 21-year-old man has and never once let on to, but is struggling with an extensive amount of rehab that he's going through at this point. Everyone of us has them. Everyone of us wants to help them. Everyone of us certainly wants to go ahead and steer them to a place that we know has impeccable quality care. I'm going to ask you since you're the expert in this area to help us to help them. Can you do that?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I'll make those inquiries. And I'd also like to add to that, that many of the injuries and the wounds that our soldiers are returning with are not physical. The mental health and the PTSD and the TBI are tremendous contributors to the overall situation. And I will make the inquiries and I will report back to you.

LEG. KENNEDY:

I'll go one step further, go ahead and confirm that. I have a marine veteran who's an intern in my legislative office right now. He's in the Stony Brook Masters and Public Policy Program, an excellent, bright, young individual who deals well, writes well, communicates well but unfortunately has a look in his eye that's hard to describe. The only way I can say it is, is he seems spooked. And here is a bright, able, articulate young man. And I wonder, I wonder what I should be saying to him as he spends his time with me each day. But you're right; the injuries clearly, many of them are unseen but very profound. So we need your help, please.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

And I would encourage a young person like your marine, very often a veteran can communicate better with a fellow veteran than a non-veteran. I would encourage you to encourage him to contact our office, to contact the Vets Center. You know, there are a number of places in and out of the VA that we can -- that we can look to.

LEG. KENNEDY:

And now you bring me full circle as you often do. Even though we're not in the budget cycle, I was distressed and I was concerned to see that going into next year, you're going to be operating with one less Veterans Service Officer; is that correct?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

We had one retirement as a result of the incentive.

LEG. KENNEDY:

And, unfortunately, with the constraints that was put on this program, you're barred from bringing another person on board.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Yes.

LEG. KENNEDY:

So at the same time that we know that we're having ever increasing numbers of veterans coming back, your resource at -- what did you work with? Five? And now you're down to four?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Yes.

LEG. KENNEDY:

A 20 percent reduction in staff?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Yes.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Amazing. That's absolutely amazing that we sit here, but we'll get to that. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Again, Ms. Alloncius, before you go, again, congratulations to you and all of your hard work. We certainly appreciate it. I would ask that as time goes on and you do receive additional information, whether that's information that we produce or the federal government produces, if you can share all of what you find out with us, and if not each of us individually then certainly get that information to our Presiding Officer and he'll be able to get that to all of us. It's important that we have all of the information that goes along with the hard work that has certainly paid off in entertaining Tricare.

MS. ALLONCIUS:

I absolutely will. Congressman Bishop's office has been working as hard as I am to try to get the numbers because it's of utmost importance. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good. Thank you. Very good. Tom, thank you.

Welcome.

MR. CURRAN:

Thank you. Mr. Chairman and members, thank you for the invitation. Appreciate the opportunity to come here -- sure. Appreciate the opportunity to come here and tell you about the services that we offer at Northport for homeless veterans.

We have a pretty comprehensive, what we refer to as a continuum of care at Northport. Generally what it starts with for a homeless veteran, who either presents to the VA or is referred from another agency, we have a shelter on the grounds of Northport where veterans are assessed for their treatment needs be it substance abuse, mental health or medical connected with the appropriate treatment. And a housing plan has begun to get the veteran into appropriate level of housing.

What we're seeing is -- we're starting to see the first waves of OIF/OEF veterans who are returning and already some of them are finding themselves homeless. And we recently added a dedicated OIF/OEF homeless veteran case manager to the staff at the facility to serve veterans.

What we do is we coordinate with all the treatment programs in the ground of the VA, the PTSD program, the substance abuse program, voc rehab programs, mental health programs. And what we do is we make sure we have these veterans plugged into the treatment they need. And then we work on moving them out into transitional housing in the community.

Right now we have a VA funded initiative for transitional housing. There's currently one not-for-profit agency in Suffolk County. That's United Veterans Beacon House, who operates seven residences for us. Out of -- that program's dedicated to veterans and recovery from substance abuse; however, there's a subsection of that grant that up to 16 beds serving frail and elderly homeless veterans. Those are veterans over the age of 65 with chronic medical conditions that impair their ability to care for themselves. It's a fantastic program. But also that's a transitional program. So we often -- you know, that program you don't count on the veterans getting better and returning to the workforce. We're really looking at -- for a long term permanent housing for them.

Recently we just rolled out the new HUD-VASH initiative; that the VA has just received 10,000 vouchers nationwide. The New York metropolitan area received a thousand. And we've just started working with the number of vouchers we have at Northport to place veterans -- chronically homeless veterans in long term permanent house. Essentially it's Section 8 Housing that comes with case management services provided by the VA in partnership with HUD. So that's been a long missing piece. The permanent housing has often been our most difficult challenge. Most of our veterans have very marginal incomes. And even after they receive the treatment, it's very difficult for them to find affordable housing here as we all know.

That's a quick thumbnail sketch of the services we're providing over at Northport. I would love to answer any questions you might have.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Kennedy.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Thank you. Your homeless housing programs are excellent. As a matter of fact, again, I had a constituent who was with the Salvation Army Homeless Housing couple of years ago. And ironically that transition piece was a challenge. But what about veterans that are going to become homeless? What about the veterans now who we have in our districts who are going south on their mortgages, who are choking like everybody else and who may be service connected, may have been in during wartime, may have even been in, you know, conventional during peace time but have issues associated with them, do they have any opportunity to get some assistance with you?

MR. CURRAN:

Actually, yes. I mean up until recently we do homelessness prevention. And often that takes the form of, you know, assessing what's the underlying issues here. Obviously lately the economy it's affecting everybody. And coincidentally the VA just rolled out a program, and I'm not real familiar with the numbers but it's geared towards low income veterans who are currently not homeless, but is geared towards preventing homelessness. And I don't have an awful lot of information on eligibility. I mean I know it's for low income veterans but it is aimed at preventing homelessness.

LEG. KENNEDY:

What I need is a phone number.

MR. CURRAN:

What I'll do is I'll get that information about that program directly to you if you'd like.

LEG. KENNEDY:

Please do.

MR. CURRAN:

Okay.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Add me to that list, please.

MR. CURRAN:

I'm sorry?

LEG. ROMAINE:

Add me to the list.

MR. CURRAN:

Certainly. I will circulate it to everyone if you would like. I'll get that information from Mr. Ronayne and I will forward that to all of you.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Thanks so much. Thanks for being with us today.

Holly?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

I just wanted to mention a couple of things. We are holding our public hearings that we're required to do each year. The state likes to have comments on our plan for the following year. We are holding the first one in Mattituck on October 28th ten o'clock in the morning. And the second one will be October 30th at the Smithtown Senior Center. As part of those, we're also going to provide some information to the seniors on the HEAP Program and also on prescription part D because that program opens November 15, goes through December 31st so we just want to let them know what they should be looking for as they decide whether they're going to stay with the plan they have or not.

The HEAP Program opens November 3rd. The benefit for oil, kerosene and propane has increased to \$800 which is a very good thing. For natural gas the max is still 585. So the, you know, the benefit did increase for the oil and the kerosene and the propane.

The Office for Aging has been, you know, we've received 3,000 applications so far from those who received the early mail out from the state. And that early mail out went to those who had already received HEAP in the past. So we're processing applications now for -- to be sent over to DSS so that they can process for payment. But November 3rd is open to everyone else. And those guidelines, I believe, were sent out by DSS to your legislative offices. So just wanted to keep you up to date on that program.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

So, Holly, we have all of that information on that program. I'm wondering if it would be possible to get the part D information that you're going to be distributing to all of us well.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

There's no -- the information's not out yet. We're doing training in the middle of November. And your offices are welcome to send staff to it. The state sets up the training. It's going to be here in Hauppauge. And our volunteers go to it and we open it up to all our contractors and other people who might be interested in having a representative there. And once that information's out, we'll be glad to share it.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Okay?

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Okay. Anyone? Okay, thanks. Director Ronayne?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Chairman, if I could just remind each of you, I should have made it a part of my report, the first annual Veterans Employment and Job Fair will be held on Friday October 17th from ten AM to two PM. It will be held at the Fire Academy in Yaphank. And we encourage -- we've got about 40

different employers participating so we encourage anybody from your districts that would like to participate, please join us.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good. Thank you.

Bob?

MR. MITCHELL:

I have some handouts. I'd like to approach?

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Sure.

MR. MITCHELL:

Hi. Mr. Chairman, who's not here, but -- oh, there he is. Okay.

Members of the Committee, my name is Bob Mitchell, Suffolk County Legal Aid. To my left is Lou Mazzola and Phil O'Reilly. I've just submitted a brief summary of what our problems are with the Senior Citizens Division. It covers the -- number one is the funding. We've been cut \$350,000 from the '09 budget so if we don't get past the -- get the \$350,000 back everything else is academic so far as the other problems that are of concern.

If we move on from there, we move on to the proposed relocation. What happened was several months ago I received a telephone call saying that our lease had expired on 5 Shore Lane. We occupy the lower -- the first floor. Second floor are the nurses and the third floor was Public Works. We were then told we were supposed to move to the most western part of Suffolk County. I made some phone calls and sent some letters out to the Legislators. And subsequent to that I started looking for space for us. And we looked around the County and around Hauppauge.

I then had a meeting with the County Exec's people at which time I told them we were in the process of attempting to move the Law Guardians which is a separate budget which contains 30 people and move them into the corporate center which is up the block from the courthouse. And said that it's a -- if it's possible they could possibly reconfigure the space so that we can move in there. When I say we, I mean the administration which has about 6 or 8 people and the Senior Citizens Division which has approximately the same amount of people.

At that time Lou Mazzola on my left got a little upset because he's been trying to get extra space for our people on the fourth floor for the criminal and the family court. And by us moving ten or so people in there, we're just going to jam it up again. We're not really accomplishing anything. But I spoke to the County about reconfiguration. And George Roach was not present either at this meeting. All right? Subsequent to that I said to the County, look, I said we could probably stagger the senior citizens so that they come in at different times and not have a long wait on the security -- for the security.

Well, lo and behold, George is really upset with me because of the fact that he says the senior citizens cannot walk that far. If you're familiar with Central Islip court building, that's a long walk. And in the winter because of the security, you have to walk at least a block. Or if you're in a wheelchair, you have to be wheeled; or if you have a walker or whatever, it's too far. And the other thing is you can't really stagger these interviews. And so they have to wait on line a half hour. And then they come upstairs and there's no place to put them.

So I'm getting a lot of heat from George and from Louie about this -- what I had stuck my head out on -- stuck my neck out on. But be that as it may, we've looked for other space. And there is other space available so that -- the other thing is that we kind of compliment George and his people because they get so many phone calls that the three of us are always answering phone calls.

Because if they go to lunch or I'm there after five o'clock, I'm getting these phone calls from these senior citizens. So George is afraid he's going to lose us too at that point. But that's basically the problem we have with the move. We would prefer to be together senior citizen and the administration.

I had said to the County, look, if you could get us private space away from the -- from the 80 or so people up on the fourth floor, that would be great. And they said well can you get money from the Law Guardians because we administer that program. So I said, no, we can't. I said the most we could ask from them is maybe 25 percent which would only -- wouldn't pay much because the County said they would go for 800 feet. So the whole thing just disintegrated.

So right now the tentative plan is to move us and the seniors to the fourth floor over in CI. The nurses on the second floor where they are now, they're going to move 30 nurses in. They're moving the infectious diseases and the home care nurses and also the HIV people on the first and second floor. The landlord called me today and said that the County is asking if she would rent the first and second floor. And there's a half floor up on top. She's asking me if we could stay where we are and take the nurses and put them on the second and third floor. She's willing to make the \$50,000 worth of renovations and she's also willing to be competitive with whatever the going rate is on the outside or even less than that.

So I said the only thing I can do is, you know, make the presentation and let the chips fall where they may. I said I'll do the best I can because we would rather stay where we are. I mean as bad as it is we'd rather stay because when those senior citizens come up, they only have to walk five feet into the building. And we have a waiting room for them. And it's wheelchair accessible. And they got the buses, etcetera to get there. So it's a more centrally located spot. It's in Bay Shore. So the space issue is, you know, is a big thing with George and with Louie and myself, I guess.

And then we move on from that to the fact that we don't get paid on time. So we may not get our first payment from the senior citizens until June. Now where am I supposed to get that money from? I mean we sign the contracts in May -- pardon me -- in December or January. We don't get any money until June. Now if you read -- when you read the reports, you'll see that I'm on the line personally for this money. And I said, hey, fellows, no more. I said unless we can get the money from the County, get an advance in December or whatever the act happens to be, I'm not going to go personal on this. It's too much money. And the contract even says I'm the guy that's responsible in case they don't pay. That's it in a nutshell.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Anybody else before we get to questions. Lou? Anybody else?

MR. MITCHELL:

You got anything you want to add, Lou?

MR. MAZZOLA:

No, I think you covered it all.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Okay. Then let's -- I just want to go through the numbers again. The amount that you're requesting this year is how much?

MR. MITCHELL:

We're requesting \$573,161. The County is giving us 218,567. This is the same act that they pulled for the last three years.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Right.

MR. MITCHELL:

Come to you for the extra 350. It's the way it's been for the last three years.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And over the last three years we restored the additional money.

MR. MITCHELL:

You restored the money, yes.

MR. O'REILLY:

We asked for 11,000 plus increase over the last year's budget so.

MR. MITCHELL:

We've kept it under the two percent cap. I think it's 1.9.

MR. O'REILLY:

1.9.

MR. MITCHELL:

1.9. They requested two percent so we kept it under the two.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Romaine.

LEG. ROMAINE:

I'm reading from the County Executive's budget for the Legal Aide Society. It says the Legal Aide Society has moved to an existing county facility saving the County over \$100,000 in associated rental cost. Have you moved?

MR. MITCHELL:

No, we haven't moved.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Thank you. Few other questions. You have requested, and the Legal Aid Society does what, defends clients that don't have funds so that they have adequate representation under the law; is that correct?

MR. MITCHELL:

That's correct. In the criminal and family court and Law Guardians.

LEG. ROMAINE:

And a Law Guardian would be someone that would be appointed to handle the legal affairs of someone that may not be -- may be a minor or may not be capable as an adult. Would that be --

MR. MITCHELL:

That's pretty -- that's basically it, yeah.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Basically it. And --

MR. MITCHELL:

That's a separate budget, though. That's a state budget.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Right, that's a separate budget. But you have asked for \$573,161 in the 2009 budget. What has

the County Executive offered up?

MR. MITCHELL:

200 and -- 200 and --

LEG. ROMAINE:

-- 18,567 dollars, less than half of what is needed. What would happen -- maybe you could explain this to me because I don't understand because I can write any number down also and say, oh, that's the budget. But what happens in reality if there is indigent people, people who don't have the means of hiring an attorney and the court orders that you -- Legal Aid Society will provide some assistance?

MR. MITCHELL:

Well, it'll come out of 18B. That would be a separate fund. There's no cap on that. There's no cap on that budget.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Right.

MR. MITCHELL:

You have to pay. But, see, this is senior citizens. Senior citizens qualify --

LEG. ROMAINE:

This is senior citizens coming, you know, someone committed fraud, can you help me out? Someone did this, someone did that. And these are people that are relatively poor that are seeking legal advice because they feel someone has taken advantage of them.

MR. MITCHELL:

But right now the big burden is the cars and the foreclosures. Foreclosures are huge now and --

LEG. ROMAINE:

Right. And they're seeking legal assistance.

MR. MITCHELL:

Yeah, because they're taking their houses away. And also you got the -- you know, they go to buy a car, they buy a car for 18,000, before you know it, it's \$27,000. They don't know what they're signing. Those are the two big areas. Also L and T's being evicted.

LEG. ROMAINE:

I think in Suffolk County maybe one of the things that we should think about bringing back is something called the misery index. Do you remember the misery index? Because obviously this is going to play a role in that misery index. So you're occupying space in Bay Shore?

MR. MITCHELL:

Yes. It accommodates us.

LEG. ROMAINE:

The old Health Center in Bay Shore that Touro took over. You're occupying space there?

MR. MITCHELL:

No, no. We're behind Siben's office, 5 Shore Lane.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Oh, Siben's office, okay, right. So you are looking -- the County Executive's looking to move you --

MR. MITCHELL:

Out.

LEG. ROMAINE:

-- to county facilities. Will these county facilities accommodate the senior program?

MR. MITCHELL:

Well, you know, I was of the opinion that it would. But based upon the information I'm receiving from Mr. Mazzola and from George Roach, it will not accommodate the senior citizens for --

LEG. ROMAINE:

Would there be special parking that would -- would the courts create special parking if you were forced to move?

MR. MITCHELL:

No, they're not going to create special parking. They have it for the judges but that's about it. Even if they had special parking, it's still too far away because you can't get up to the front of it. They have all security, you have the big --

LEG. ROMAINE:

Let's talk about contracts. You say that you sign a contract December, January.

MR. MITCHELL:

Right.

LEG. ROMAINE:

But this year you weren't paid 'til June of this year?

MR. MITCHELL:

That's correct.

LEG. ROMAINE:

How do you make your payroll?

MR. MITCHELL:

You want me to go to jail? I can't tell you that.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Well, obviously -- and they make you personally responsible for this?

MR. MITCHELL:

Yeah. I get the money. I mean I take the money out of another fund.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Right.

MR. MITCHELL:

But I mean I'm in jeopardy by doing that. I can't be doing that all the time. That's dangerous.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Has the County offered an explanation as to why they delay your payments to you?

MR. MITCHELL:

No.

LEG. ROMAINE:

They have offered -- have you asked?

MR. MITCHELL:

Oh, yeah.

LEG. ROMAINE:

And what is their response when you ask?

MR. MITCHELL:

They're getting to it. You know, they're too busy. They can't get around to the contracts.

LEG. ROMAINE:

I only ask that because Cornell Cooperative Extension, which is the largest contract agency the County has, because there's multiple contracts, they didn't get paid 'til September of this year and August of last year. There seems to be a problem with contracts.

MR. MITCHELL:

I can't borrow money because if I borrow money, I got to pay interest on that. You guys aren't going to give me the money to pay the interest.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Absolutely. There seems to be a problem with prompt payment or cash flow management or a combination of things.

MR. MITCHELL:

That's correct.

LEG. ROMAINE:

I still can't get answers on that although I've raised questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Other members may have questions as well.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Anyone else? Legislator Kennedy.

LEG. KENNEDY:

My question, Mr. Chair, is one that I don't think any of us can answer at the table here, which is what is that the Office for Aging receives? Well, actually maybe, Holly, do you know through 3B?

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Holly, come step up.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

3B requires a certain percentage be -- I believe it's 7 percent. We do more than that than our 3B budget. So they've received more money than we're required to by law to give them with the 218,000. That's not to say we that don't need more money but it's just -- we do provide more money than we're required to under the federal laws.

LEG. KENNEDY:

So clearly there's got to be a disconnect then between our level of need and our concentration of seniors that are deriving services because all of us know first hand the services that, you know, Legal Aid, Senior Citizens Legal Aid in particular does. And the complexities of the cases that George and Mr. {Carr} and the rest of them handle. They are, you know, seniors are getting scammed and ripped six ways to Sunday.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Right.

LEG. KENNEDY:

And, you know, there's precious few places that we can direct them besides yourselves. Really no place else.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

It really comes down to, though, is that the federal government has not kept up with their responsibilities with the money that we get for 3B.

MR. MITCHELL:

You know, if I can aid to that, you know the reason why we went to the County to do this a number of years ago to add to this budget is because we were operating this program with somewhere around the same amount of money. And when I started doing these budgets or being involved with this program perhaps almost 14 or 15 years ago, we were receiving something like \$150,000 and it went up by that much of an increase over these years. So, you know, the same dollar you had in 15 years ago is just not the dollar we have today. So what's happened is although the amount -- the amount has basically eroded because of inflation. And we just can't do what we did before with that same dollar.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Anybody else? Any idea how many seniors the division assisted last year?

MR. MITCHELL:

Yes, 3500.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And do you know what type of increase or decrease that was over the prior year?

MR. MITCHELL:

It was an increase about the same.

MR. O'REILLY:

It was about a hundred.

MR. MITCHELL:

About a hundred more.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

One hundred more or less?

MR. MITCHELL:

More.

MR. O'REILLY:

A hundred more.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Than the prior year? Is there a projected number for this year?

MR. O'REILLY:

Currently we're running about the same, a little bit more.

MS. ORTIZ:

I'm sorry. You have to use the microphone, sir.

MR. O'REILLY:

Excuse me, I'm sorry.

MS. ORTIZ:

Thank you.

MR. O'REILLY:

Currently we're running around the same number, a little bit more. Now the problem with that is we have -- each case is a client. But we could have a client with five cases.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Yeah.

MR. O'REILLY:

So, we have what they call under our reporting requirements unduplicated cases, meaning unduplicated clients. So one client could have a half hour one case, another one could have ten cases. And it's just -- we measure one person for each. That's the way we report.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And how many attorneys are working in that division now?

MR. MITCHELL:

We've got three attorneys. One full-time, one part time and two paralegals. And whatever we can contribute, the three of us.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

I wish George was here today because I'm sure what I say and all of us believe and would share that the job that they do for our seniors is just outstanding and right on; that there literally is no place else to go for those seniors that require this type of assistance.

MR. MITCHELL:

Well, that's why I'm pitching for us to stay in Bay Shore, you know, because George is knocking his brains out running back and forth and sometimes he's beside himself. I say, George, take a walk around the block, you know, we'll answer the phone.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Anybody else? Anything else? All right. Very good. Thank you.

MR. MITCHELL:

Thank you very much.

MR. O'REILLY:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Paul?

MR. ARFIN:

Good afternoon. My name is Paul Arfin. And I'm President of Intergenerational Strategies which recent -- I am here today at the request of the Chair to tell you briefly a little bit about a new partnership that we've established with Dowling College. We've established the center for Intergenerational policy and practice at Dowling College. And I think the goals and objectives of what -- why we established this are just so timely now in light of the very serious economic conditions that we all are facing. And the whole question of how those conditions are going to affect the young and the -- the very young and the very old.

Ron Roel is with me. Some of you may know him as the former editor of the retirement section at Newsday at two. And he's working -- he's been working with us for the last few months. I know time is of the essence. I want to -- before I make -- go to the power point, which I will do very briefly, it seems to me that, you know, based on the discussions I've heard over the last hour and just common sense, this body over the upcoming weeks is going to have to make some very serious decisions having to do with the quality of life for many of our residents.

If I were to state the essence of what I put before you, is we need to obviously look at what we can cut. But at the same time I suggest that we need to look at how we use the assets that we have. And I don't think that we're doing as good a job as we could -- as we can in that area.

Just real quickly, we're going to be living a lot longer. Families are -- people are living farther away, older people, from their families. And older people in effect are that asset that to me we are not deploying as effectively as we could. A national study in April by a major surveying firm indicates that 50 percent -- 50 percent of people between the ages of 44 and 70 want to switch careers and go into some form of public service: Education, health care, etcetera. That's the asset that I see we're not using very effectively.

If somebody volunteers over a hundred hours a year, there are slower declines in their self reported health and physical functioning, which means lower cost. There's an increase -- less depression levels and lower mortality rates. To me, I'm not talking about older people stuffing envelopes. Not even driving people to the clinic when they need it or mentoring a child, although those things are very important. I'm talking about tapping into the professional and managerial expertise of older adults to help our non-profit organizations, minimize the suffering that they're going to experience, not in 2009, but over the upcoming years because it's my opinion that we're in for some very serious not short term but long term consequences.

Here are some very practical recommendations based upon what I just said. It seems to me that the first step is, is to put together a group of people that develops a strategy to increase, to encourage boomers to remain engaged through work and voluntarism. And I know that this raises issues that have to do with unions; but on the other hand I know this body years ago acknowledged the fact that volunteer -- acknowledged that volunteers have a legitimate role to play in public service.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

But let me just interrupt real quick.

MR. AFFIN:

Sure.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

In fact when you were the Chairman of the Commission --

MR. AFFIN:

Right.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

-- that you had chaired, I think you addressed that.

MR. AFFIN:

Yeah.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Maybe you can share with us the County's position on the use of volunteerism, how it relates or does not relate to our county workers.

MR. AFFIN:

Well, I really can't say because the County Executive abolished the Commission. So he really never acted on that particular recommendation so I really can't say, you know, what his position is on that particular issue.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

But there is a -- there was a ruling or regulation which essentially says that volunteers do not presume to take the place of county workers and there should be no conflict.

MR. AFFIN:

Yes. The principle there is that they don't take a job away from a public servant and they do work that otherwise wouldn't get done. And basically these are part-time positions. I'm talking about people working 10, 20 hours a week. Okay? As a CPA, as an accountant, as a former insurance broker, as a marketing expert, as a public relations expert, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera; all kinds of people.

So it seems to me that like any responsible thing, first you got to identify the problem, the assets, the liabilities and develop a plan. I suggest that -- and I developed this weeks ago. So I'm not so sure that I would put it on the table right now, but seek funding to conduct a study for the purpose of better understanding the plans for work and volunteerism of Long Island's older adults. You know, to what extent is the study -- the survey that was done on a national level, does it hold water in Suffolk County? A lot of the people, that if they were reached would they come forth to do some of the things that I'm describing?

The next one, this I must admit that this presentation was originally put together for the LIA. Okay, so that's why I'm going to ignore that one.

Employers need to establish guidelines about how to effectively hire, retain and train older adults and assist middle age people and older workers to develop life plans, provide -- a lot of people just have not thought about what they're going to do with the rest of their life when they retire at 55 and 60 and 65. And obviously because of the economy, more and more of us are going to have to work longer. Whether we want to or not, we're going to have to work longer. So let's channel of some of those folks into public service.

Pre-retirement planning. There are some union programs that provide pre-retirement programs to help people think through not just the social security issues and pension issues but also the psychological and social issues having to do with retirement.

We need a campaign to promote adult employment and volunteerism. That was also part of our recommendations a couple of years ago, you know, the County -- the job service doesn't have a particular outreach unless something's happening in the last two years, to the older worker; to the older worker.

And so I'm going to stop right there and entertain any questions. I guess I'll just finish, establish a data base of Long Island employees nearing the traditional retirement years who want to continue employment. Who are they? And let's connect them up with vacancies, you know, in the labor force. In an ideal world, we'd have a full-time office of volunteerism and community service at the County level, to give recognition to the importance of this stuff. I'll still stop right there.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Anybody? Picking up on that last element because I think that's the important one, I guess the question is what should county government be doing to help with this process? Maybe you can discuss that proposal in a little more depth.

MR. ARFIN:

Well, I guess the first one and the last one -- the last one costs money, you know, to create an

office of volunteerism/community service. But creating an entity whether it's through the Legislature or otherwise that looks at developing a strategy to recruit older adults, the boomers and others into public service; to take a serious look at that. That's the asset that I was referring to.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Why should that be -- why should there be a cost element there? Shouldn't the Commissioner of -- be a volunteer?

MR. ARFIN:

No. I said that one doesn't have to be a cost element. I'm saying the latter one, to create an office of, you know, volunteer and community service, that would have a cost associated with it.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Shouldn't the people who work in that office be volunteers?

MR. ARFIN:

Ideally, yes. But whether it could be done or not is another question. I mean certainly, you know, there's RSVP, there are, you know, programs. But I'm thinking -- I think that the challenge before us is much bigger than the existing resources. So I do think that, you know, some expenditure -- let me just see. I think I -- yeah. A one percent increase in the number of older adults who become employed, 550, working ten hours a week for 40 weeks a year at a rate of \$20 an hour is \$4.4 million of new payroll in the economy. And 500 old adults into new unpaid volunteer assignments working little over three hours a week for 40 weeks a year, in other words, they want the flexibility to go places and whatever, that also produces economic productivity.

So this is not just -- and I might mention in closing that Governor Schwarzenegger in California has created this office at -- in his cabinet and has set up a statewide campaign to promote this kind of volunteerism. And the US government is losing very high level employees, you know, due retirements. And they have developed a campaign to encourage people to stay in the workforce longer or to, you know, either in public service or otherwise. So there are models of this around the country. And I think some of this needs to happen here.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Thank you.

MR. AFFIN:

Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Questions? Question? Ron, did you have anything that you wanted to add?

MR. ROEL:

Just really no more particular. But I just think, Mr. Chair, that this is, you know, we see what's happening in the markets today, there are some things that come at us like tornados but this is really, you know, more like a hurricane. I mean we can see it in the distance but the issue of our workforce here and ways to grow our economy, I think, is a serious issue. And that, you know, we're really in some ways in demographic denial which is we recognize and it is true that we're losing a lot of young people, you know, in Long Island. And this has been a concern that's been recognized so at the same time we need to create, you know, environments and affordable housing to retain our younger people, I think it's also true that as we go through especially in the next ten years this demographic trough of, you know, just less -- fewer people entering, younger people entering the workforce, we do need to think about how we retain older workers. And really as a transition to also help train and mentor the younger workers. So I just would like to underline the general proposal. I know there are a lot of specifics proposed. Paul's gone through them. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good. Anybody? All right. Thank you. Thanks so much for being here. We appreciate it.

INTRODUCTORY RESOLUTIONS

Okay. We have one introductory resolution on the agenda today. It is **IR 1869, adopting Local Law number - 2008, a local law expanding tax exemptions granted to spouses and unremarried surviving spouses of veterans. (CE Levy)** This, I believe, needs to be tabled for a public hearing. So I'll make the motion.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Second.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Second by Legislator Eddington. All in favor? Any opposed? Any abstentions? Motion carries.
(Vote: 4-0-0-1. Legislator Montano not present)

That concludes our agenda and our business today. Anybody else? Motion to adjourn by Legislator Romaine, second by Legislator Kennedy. We are adjourned. Thank you.

**THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 2:47 PM
{ } DENOTES SPELLED PHONETICALLY**