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 4, 2010.

MEMBERS PRESENT:
Leg. Steven H. Stern, Chairman
Leg. Jack Eddington, Vice Chair
Leg. Jon Cooper (Not Present)
Leg. Daniel P. Losquadro
Leg. Edward P. Romaine

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:
George Nolan, Counsel to the Legislature
Renee Ortiz, Chief Deputy Clerk
Laura Halloran, Budget Review Office
Benny Pernice, BRO
Ed Hennessey, Aide to County Executive
Tom Ronayne, Director of Veterans Service Agency
Holly Rhodes-Teague, Director of Office for the Aging
Paul Perillie, Aide to Majority Leader
Linda Bay, Aide to Minority Leader
Deborah Harris, Aide to Leg. Stern
Dot Kerrigan, AME Legislative Representative
David Kilmnick, Senior Advisory for Gay and Lesbian Elders
Irene Tsikitas, Long Island Program Coordinator, SAGE
Ellen Davis, SAGE
Bob Maletta, SAGE
Linda Beinhauer, SAGE
John Molin, SAGE
Bob Malett, SAGE
Bill Huckaby, SAGE
Louis Lisi, SAGE
Roy Schmitt, SAGE
George D. Boyd, SAGE
Mac Speights, SAGE
Robert G. Titus, SAGE
Regina M. Pfeifer, Soldiers Project
Rick Brand, Newsday
Jack Caffey, Aide to Presiding Office
And all other interested parties

THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 11:39 AM

CHAIRMAN STERN:
Welcome everybody to the Committee on the Vets and Seniors. I'll ask everybody to please rise and join us in the Pledge of allegiance led by Legislator Eddington.

SALUTATION

I ask everyone 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 freedom overseas in our thoughts and prayers.

MOMENT OF SILENCE OBSERVED

Welcome and thank you for joining us today. We have a few presentations today and then we do have items on our agenda that require votes. First I'm going to invite Director Ronayne to join us. Tom?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:
Good morning, Chairman Stern, members of the Committee, thank you again for the invitation to join you today.

I don't have a great deal to report on this morning other than some recent events and some upcoming events. Last week we had a ceremony to bestow -- pardon my cough this morning -- a very long overdue honor to a medal of honor recipient from the Town of Riverhead. Private Garfield Langhorn was killed in Vietnam, I believe, it was 1968 and was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions in Vietnam. This past week we finally with the cooperation of the town officials in Riverhead, the US Post Office, Congressman Bishop, I know Legislator Romaine was in attendance, the post -- the main post office in Riverhead was dedicated and renamed after Private Garfield Langhorn. His mother was in attendance. It was very well attended. It was a wonderful ceremony. And again it was a long overdue honor. And I'm proud that Suffolk County had some small role in accomplishing this.

We also over the weekend, I know I saw you, Chairman Stern, on Friday in Huntington. We had the honor of having the traveling Vietnam Wall through Dignity Memorial present its program in Huntington. And it was -- it's always a moving experience to visit that wall. It will be in Islip again this coming week beginning on Friday. Anybody who has not experienced it, whether you have a Vietnam connection or not, it's truly breathtaking when you see what goes into it and what is represented on that wall. So, again, it will be in Islip this coming Friday. And, again, I would encourage everybody to take a few moments and visit it, just experience it for themselves.

That being said, the progress on the clinic in Riverhead is moving forward. My understanding is we're just a couple weeks maybe from turning the keys over to the VA, at which time they'll begin to furnish and equip the space. And based on VA's projections for their requirements, we're still projecting a December opening.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
That's good. Okay. Anything else?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:
Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
Thank you; thanks so much. Holly?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Good morning. I just had a couple of things. The Office for Aging will be holding its public hearings. We're required by state law to hold public hearings for each year on our plan for the following year so from April 1st to March 31st -- April 1st, 2011 to March 31st, 2012 the public hearings will be held -- one will be held on Tuesday October 26th at 9:30 at the Smithtown Senior Center. And the second one will be held in Southampton at the Hampton Bays Senior Center on November 1st at 10:30 in the morning. And we do look forward to hearing from the seniors as to what programs work, what might be more helpful for them. We usually have a pretty decent turn out when we're at the sites to tell us how the programs affect their lives. So it's a very good thing for us to hear and, you know, nice for folk us to come out there also.

The second thing I just wanted to mention we have been doing Medicare meetings. And it happens on the days that we're doing the public hearings, we'll also be doing the Medicare work shops out at those centers as well an hour later; or right after depending on which site it's at. And those Medicare meetings have been very well attended. We were getting, you know, 40 to 50 people at each of them. And they are very appreciative of the fact that we're out there talking about Medicare, Medicare 101, what does part A do, what does part B do, prescription Part D. So they've been very well attended and a lot of questions. So I just wanted to let you know that those have been very helpful to the seniors out there.

In terms of HEAP, I do have the income guidelines with me because I know last time somebody had asked for them. The *Dear Colleague* letter will not go out until we can open the program up November 1st. But for the use of your offices, I do have the guide lines in terms of the income.

The program at this point -- the applications for those who received HEAP in the past we've received 4,100 applications and we've processed almost 3,000 of those apps already. The program does open November 1st; but those who have not received HEAP in the past, they can call our office now and request us to put them on our mailing list. We will send out the applications as soon as we can on November 1st. So if you do have people who have not had HEAP in the past they can give our office a call and we will put them on the mailing list for the applications.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
Holly, about how long does the application process take these days?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:
From our end we try to get them done in a few weeks. But we're not -- we're just a subcontractor to the Department of Social Services. And then they go to DSS for final approval. And at that end I'm not sure how long it takes. So, I know that we get inundated with the apps so I'm not really sure how long they take to process on their end. Nobody will get a check until November 1st. So even these applications that we've processed and sent to DSS, checks don't get mailed out until after November 1st. It's just a preliminary that they do all the stuff beforehand.

The other thing is I know you have a presentation by SAGE Long Island today. I just wanted to voice my opinion that they've been doing a great job and stuff, that they only started a couple years ago. We've been working very cooperatively with them to provide services and trying to be a liaison between them and the towns trying to get services in different places. But it's been a very, very good working relationship. I just wanted to let you know that.

Any questions?

CHAIRMAN STERN:
Holly, thank you. Regina? Regina, you just have to hold down the button to talk. Great.

MS. PFEIFER:
I got it. I'm not good with this electronic stuff.

I'm here to represent the Soldiers Project, which is a free volunteer organization that was started a few years ago out in California as a response to the young men and women who are coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan with psychological problems because the ethos of the Army is to stand tall and endure, many of these young men and women won't recognize that they need help. And it is our goal to help them and to get out there and let other people understand what the symptoms are, their families and their friends so that they can encourage them to come for help.

It's a totally free no insurance, no paper work. You meet with a therapist. It's all totally confidential. And the biggest problem we're having, it's is very interesting, the few men or women that have come, will come for like one session and then not come back again. And certainly not that they don't need help; but again a lot of these young men and women are afraid, don't recognize the fact that they need help.
I think there are something like 7,000 soldiers returning to Long Island. That's a lot of young men and women out there that are going to need help.

Jobs are an issue for them. And getting reintegrated back into life with their family and friends is a very difficult thing. So, please, if you know anyone that you think could use the services, it's a -- you call a number and then you're directed to someone hopefully near you. I guess that's it.

Are there any questions? I will leave you information. And hopefully you can pass it out and please call the free number. There's a lot of young men and women who are going to need some assistance.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
Regina, I have a couple questions for the Director in regard to what you had just said. But I'm wondering maybe if you could just take a moment and explain how you came to be involved in this project and what it means to you.

MS. PFEIFER:
Me, yes. Well, I'm a registered nurse work. I work in a psych unit at Brookhaven Hospital. I actually befriend a young man there who they initially had diagnosed with schizophrenia. He didn't have schizophrenia. He was suffering from post traumatic stress disorder. He was living in the woods behind the Seven/11 when they brought him in. And I have a son in the army. And I can't do anything to help him, but this young man was right there in front of me. So I went to bat for him.

And then I saw an article in one of the nursing journals about the Soldiers Project. And I called. And since then I have been out to all the clinics, to any place that I can think of where there are people who would be able to send -- help these young men and women get help. A lot of them don't want to go to the VA because it's a stigma. They feel that it's a stigma. And that's -- I've seen this firsthand. This young man will not -- will not go to the VA for help. And he's one of I don't know how many.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:
Nobody really knows.

MS. PFEIFER:
Right. It's a crime that these kids are living in the woods.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
First of all, I'm sure I speak for all of my colleagues when I say thank you to your son, of course, for his service and for your commitment and dedication as well.

Director Ronayne, maybe you can comment on, you know, first of all, the scope of the issue as you understand it. We've had this discussion here at times with Committee members about identifying the scope of the problem, you know, how the system is working or not working and what role, if

any, we can help to play in ensuring that those who are returning get the proper care that they need.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:
I think the short answer for the overall scope of the problem is nobody really knows. You know, we've got so many young people -- not even young people, but so many service members and veterans who are serving now and are continuing to return home with these problems.

And in the military mindset, one of the things that you do is you don't lie down; you don't fail. And to many of these folks when they come home, they may begin to think that they have psychological or other problems. It's a defeat. It's a failure to admit or acknowledge this. So denial is a tremendous problem, lack of awareness, lack of education is a big problem. And very often one of the big problems that we see when they do accept that they have a problem is a large percentage of them will begin to self medicate. Alcohol and substance abuse, obviously those problems lend themselves to poor decision making. And it's a terrible cycle.

We have a similar situation at the VA where soldiers will come in, they'll enroll and we'll see them once, maybe twice and they won't return. So one of the things that we've been doing, Chairman, as you're aware, we have a very aggressive outreach program. We work very closely with the homeless partners and we partner with the VA, go out on a regular basis looking for these individuals living in the woods, these individuals living in vans and cars, in other inappropriate type housing situations. And we try to provide alternatives to them such as the Soldiers Project; that if they don't want to go to the VA, that there are other resources.

We had an event recently in partnership with Phoenix House. And it was Operation Recognition. The core of that operation or that event was certainly to target our veterans and our soldiers and make them aware of mental health treatment alternatives and so forth. But what we did, and I think it was a unique approach was, we really targeted the families because the moms and dads, the wives, the children of, other loved ones very often are the first to recognize that these problems exist or how serious these problems are.

So it's a very complex problem. The approaches to it are multifaceted. And, you know, we're only scratching the surface. As hard as everybody is working on this, there's a great deal more to be done. And at the end of the day it's resources. It's being able to, you know, as we say, get boots on the ground, get people out there in the field working with them and educating them as to what is available.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
One of the things that was just mentioned was troubling because it's not enough of a challenge just to be able to identify through an outreach efforts those that need the assistance. It's not just a challenge to bring them in to undergo treatment. But as you've just said, even if they start the process, to keep them going within the process. And so I guess my question to you is what does that say about the available services that we have here locally?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:
Well, I think we have excellent programs and excellent services in this area. And despite what sometimes people hear about the VA, I personally, professionally and as a veteran consider the Northport VA facility to be the jewel in the crown of the VA network. They really are an exceptional facility.

You know, one of the problems with -- there are several, but I'll give you a couple. First that personal or individual failure, the admission to oneself that you have these types of problems and need assistance is a tough thing for a soldier to stand up to. Another one is, there is still a stigma attached to seeking assistance for mental health issues. Even though the door has opened widely for treating folks with PTSD, there's still a stigma attached to it.

Another problem is re-enlisting. Very often soldiers will get out of service, spend a little bit of time re-acclimating to civilian life and decide that they want to return to service, that they prefer that way of life. And their concerns then become if I have mental health treatments in my service record, will I be welcome back so it's --

CHAIRMAN STERN:
This past weekend I was just at a function with the Fighting 69th who, as you know, are gearing up yet once again.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:
Yes.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
For deployment. So certainly coming home and getting re-acclimated and having to go back and coming home, re-acclimating again and yet again having to go back maybe the third, fourth, sometimes the fifth time is a challenge in and of itself.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:
Yeah. And the Fighting 69th makes a good example. We both have friends in the unit. And over the years as they deployed, returned home, deployed again, returned home and now are preparing to deploy again, they're a National Guard unit. Yet when you look at the faces and the names of the folks who have deployed several times and continue to serve full-time in the unit, they're the same people. They're coming home, but they're not leaving the National Guard and going back to their civilian lives. They're staying in uniform. You know, it's a serious issue. As you said, there are many, many approaches to it; some better than others. All of them have some validity because, you know, it's necessary to think outside of the box in approaching these issues, but I wish I had a magic wand. Unfortunately we don't.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
Well, certainly becoming more and more aware of the programs that Regina points out and discusses today is critical ensuring that our veterans and their families and other resources that are available, that we know the resources that are available so that when we're working with residents that we represent, that we can help point them in the direction. So I thank you for being with us today.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:
And you said something very important just now. When you have constituents come into your offices, don't focus solely on the veteran. The family members are key to this. And, you know, if the family members are not aware that there is a support network out there, very often that's the end of the game. So the family members are crucial, they're critical to this process.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
Thank you. Regina, thank you so much for being with us today.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:
Thank you, again.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
David, welcome. Before you begin, if you can just everybody identify yourselves for the record.

MR. KILMNICK:
My name is David Kilmnick.

MS. TSIKITAS:
Irene Tsikitas.

MS. DAVIS:
Ellen Davis.

MR. MALETTA:
Bob Maletta.

MR. KILMNICK:
Good morning. Thank you for having us here this morning to talk about services and advocacy for GLBT elders, GLBT, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender elders, Long Island, otherwise known as SAGE Long Island. And my name is David Kilmnick and I'm the Chief Executive Officer of the Long Island GLBT Services Network of which SAGE Long Island is a part of.

And I'm just going to give a brief framework on our presentation. I'm going to talk about how SAGE Long Island started. I'm not going to give you this long, long history; just a quick snapshot of SAGE Long Island. And then Irene, who is the program coordinator for SAGE Long Island, is going to talk a little bit about our services and how many seniors in Suffolk County we are currently serving. And then what I think is always the most effective and the best approach is to talk to the seniors themselves. And Ellen and Bob are going to share a little bit.

So I have worked with pretty much everyone around the horseshoe. As part of founding Long Island Gay and Lesbian Youth, also known as LIGALY, and we founded that organization 18 -- 17, 18 years ago back in whatever 17, 18 years is minus from here, 1993, I believe. 1993. And for many years we were the only GLBT health and human service organization in Suffolk County; so although LIGALY's age ranged served 13 to 21 and their families, we always had a lot of folks who contacted us and said *where can I go for services?* There were no other programs that people felt that they can access in the County.

And so we felt like it was time to do something else. And we quickly met with the LIGALY board of directors and we said *should we change our mission so that it serves everyone across the entire life span?* And it was a quick discussion, two minute discussion where the answer was no. You know, that a youth organization should really be focused in on serving youth and families. So we went to the drawing board and said *what could we do?*

And what we did was we hosted focus groups with more than 100 seniors in Suffolk County over a year, year-and-a-half to find out what the true issues were. And in the meantime we thought about -- we incorporated SAGE Long Island as a non-profit organization. And we said *well, how is this going to work,* you know, where resources are pretty limited, *how can we do things efficiently?*

And so what we did was we created the Long Island GLBT Services Network, which is an association of three different non-profits: LIGALY, SAGE Long Island and also the Long Island GLBT Community Center. And we did this so that we didn't have to create new non-profits that would need new executive directors, that would need new development departments, that would need new administration; that we already had a system in place that could be efficient fiscally and efficient programatically.

So that gives you a little bit of a history in terms of how SAGE Long Island -- how SAGE Long Island got started. And as Holly mentioned before, we have an excellent relationship -- working relationship with the Suffolk County Office for the Aging. And Holly has been a great asset to us to start to gain access to different places to hold programs and services, which Irene is going to talk more about.

SAGE Long Island operates on a very small budget because we have one grant from New York State, the New York State Department of Health. It started out as a $57,000 grant a couple of years ago. It's down to about 52,000 now after the cuts. And so we are the only organization in Suffolk County -- the only organization in the entire county providing services to GLBT seniors. And there are a lot of GLBT seniors out here that are in need of our services. And before I turn it over to

Irene, when we applied for that grant -- and by the way, forming our network the way that we formed it, each organization is an independent 501 (C) 3. So that if there is a request for proposals from the State, we could submit three different applications to bring more resources to our county.

And so SAGE Long Island was a winner in that application. But in submitting that grant, we had to call many of the other senior centers around the County and other senior serving organizations to ask for a letter of support. And when we introduced who we were, we said, you know, *we're services and advocacies for and gay and lesbian elders,* and *we're trying to provide a safe space and nurturing space for our gay and lesbian elder population in Suffolk County, we'd like to talk with you a little bit more about we're doing, what we plan to do. And we'd like, you know, to see if we can get a letter of support from you.* From many of those organizations in Suffolk County it was a quick answer and then a hang-up saying *we have none of those.* And that's what indicated to us -- meaning none of -- what they called *those*, you know the gay and lesbian people.

And so that was a quick indicator to us that you know what? This organization is -- we knew it was important, but we knew it was critical that we get these services up and running because there are many GLBT seniors across the entire County that are left alone and isolated. And I think Irene is going to talk about some of the focus group -- some of the stuff that we heard in the focus group so I'm going to turn it over to Irene now.

MS. TSIKITAS:
Good morning. My name is I'm Irene Tsikitas. I am a social worker and the Program Coordinator for SAGE Long Island. I want to give you a few facts about GLBT seniors. Two thirds or 60 percent of GLBT seniors live alone as compared to 40% of the general population putting them at risk for socialized isolation and health programs. Nearly 20% of GLBT seniors have no one to call in case of an emergency, which is ten times higher than heterosexual seniors. Seniors in suburban areas like Long Island are much more likely to report socialized isolation. Those who did not go to events at GLBT Centers such as SAGE Long Island were even more isolated. Of the top 50 counties in the country where same sex senior couples reside, Suffolk County rates as number 14.

SAGE Long Island in many ways is a like a senior center. Over the past year we have had GLBT seniors walk through our doors 2001 times to use our services. And this represents a 56% increase from last year demonstrating a significant increase in access to services.

The following popular programs are very similar to programs that occur at senior centers. We collaborated with Suffolk County Office for the Aging how the senior advocate attends SAGE Long Island once a month to provide entitlement and benefit counseling. We have a Monday Mingle which just celebrated its three-year anniversary which is a weekly social group for GLBT seniors. It is nationally a welcoming and supportive space and we see an average of 25 seniors a week.

We have an East End Mingle which is a spinoff to our Monday Mingle and has reached 50 people in a short five months. East End Mingle meets at the Town of Southampton Hampton Bay Senior Center. Unfortunately we have had to decrease the consistency of this program with a large possibility of cutting it fully because of the lack of funds to continue it. And it is a clearly needed program.

Having to minimize our services would further isolate GLBT seniors. SAGE Long Island is a second home to many of our members and the only place that they can be who they really are without fear of judgement. Thank you.

MR. KILMNICK:
That gives you just a brief background on what we're doing with very little money, too, in terms of providing services to seniors in Suffolk County. I mean to have more than 2100 folks come through our doors this past year, there's an awful lot more that can't get to Bay Shore where our center is located that need our services.

And before I turn it to over to Bob who's going to go next and then we'll finish up with Ellen, when we did the focus groups, there are a couple of things that stood out for me when we were doing these focus groups to ask folks, you know, what the needs were, how did they feel, how did they feel Suffolk County was for them as GLBT seniors. And two things in particular. One person said well, *I have a local senior center. And when I go there, I feel totally isolated. You know, I try to talk about who I am. And people sit at a different table, you know.* And so they felt like they couldn't go to their local senior center.

And the second thing, I mean there was a lot, but the other thing that stood out for me is when someone spoke up and they said that they lost their partner of more than 35 years. And they went to a bereavement group. And when they shared with the rest of their members of the bereavement group that, you know, they had just lost their partner of more than 35 years, they immediately were met with a reaction of *well, why are you here? You know, you weren't married so your relationship wasn't real or valid like mine.* And so many of our GLBT seniors can't even just grieve, you know, for the loss of a loved one. And so, you know, it's real important for us, the, to start some bereavement groups.

So it just gives you -- those two examples, I think, you know, give an idea of the incredible isolation that people are left with as, you know, as they age and get older. And for many GLBT seniors, you know, lose a high quality of life, which everyone in this County should have. So I'm going to turn it over to Bob.

MR. MALETTA:
Good morning. I'm Bob Maletta. I'm a program participant in SAGE Long Island. And I come before you today to speak on their behalf. I'm known as a late bloomer. I came to this life late in my life. I was married, led a completely straight life, have a son 40 years old; had no real idea where I was going. Had an awakening. I did the right thing and I left my marriage. I should note that my wife and I still love each other very much, just we could no longer stay together.

My dilemma was where do I go, where do I belong? And how do I enter this new life? All complex questions for a man in my 50's found out that the world where I grew up, there was no place for me anymore. I had no real close men friends who could understand my new way of life. The invitations stopped coming. I grew up in a world where gay was not okay. Men and women my age lived in the closet. Was I now to hide in the closet? So many questions and really no one to turn to. The few gay people I knew were gay from birth. And even they had a hard time relating to a a straight man, now a gay man. I was, of course, welcomed but the invitations were not so forthcoming.

I suddenly found myself alone yet I still had to work. I was a County worker; 36 years I worked in this County. Did most of the signs in Suffolk County. None of you because you're all new but --

LEG. ROMAINE:
I remember you.

MR. MALETTA:
You knew me, Ed.

LEG. ROMAINE:
I remember you, Bob.

MR. MALETTA:
I was also 12 of those years spent as a union rep, blue collar grievance chairman. So now the last time ten years of my career I lived in the closest at work. I definitely could not feel comfortable coming out there. When I retired panic began to set in. I no longer had work to occupy my time. What was I going to do, where was I going to go? I was alone. Where could I meet similarly situated men and women? I was at sea interested in forging new social relationships. That was

what was important to me at this point in my life.

I found SAGE Long Island on the Long Island Pride website. It mentioned a Monday Mingle for senior GLBT men and women. I was hooked. I went to a meeting in November of 2008. And I've been attending ever since. I was home. Men and women, some gay from birth, some gay late in life and some with children, even some like me with grandchildren, I was overwhelmed by what I found at SAGE. I found life.

I was warmly welcomed. And being a snow bird, when I return from Florida in the spring, it's amazing. I walk into the SAGE room and I feel like I'm with family. That's how warm and welcoming they are. Here were people just like me; people I could share my story, my life, my feelings with. I was no longer going to be confined to a life of being alone in my home living a solitary life. I have a circle of friends that I call on, call on the phone, go to a movie, go out to lunch. This was living again.

SAGE Long Island produces a monthly calendar of events. We go on nature outings, we go to restaurants, we go to theatre. We do dances. We have yoga, we have movie night. There's a full schedule. And the folks at the center continue to expand that calendar. I now have when I choose a full, full social life thanks to SAGE Long Island with like-minded people. How wonderful now that all of Suffolk County seniors have a place to go and socialize. Our Mingle keeps growing as does the East End Mingle. I attend the East End Mingle also. And I've now made friends there who winter in Florida the same place that I do. So now thanks to SAGE, I have a circle of friends in Florida. There's no pretense, no lies; just men and women at SAGE being free.

Many things that matter to me on a personal level since my life change and my retirement have happened through my involvement with SAGE. I don't have to be alone. I don't have to hide. I have a posse; gray as we may be, ours number are growing. And SAGE Long Island is our safe haven. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
Ellen?

MS. DAVIS:
How do you expect me to follow that? My name is Ellen Davis. I'm a member of SAGE Long Island. I'm 64-years-old and was introduced to SAGE two years ago upon my retirement as a recreation therapist working in a geriatric facility. Now I'm dealing with aging from a personal perspective. SAGE has provided me with a safe and welcoming community. Since joining SAGE I have enlarged my circle of friends and found support and encouragement. The one thing SAGE does, enables me to connect with others, provides opportunities for intellectual growth, exploring new interests, social and leisure activities and health wellness programs.

Through SAGE I was connected to the Suffolk County Office of Aging and provided with information on entitlement programs. Because SAGE is such a welcoming atmosphere, I felt secure in sharing my personal information. I'm not sure I would have done so in any other senior center. I would feel as if I would have to explain myself and out myself yet again. At SAGE you're accepted as who you are without explanation as soon as you step through the door. The staff at SAGE walked me through the labyrinth of paperwork for my pension application, lessening the frustration of the process.

I am single. I have always lived alone. Without SAGE and all it entails, I would have had fewer opportunities to leave my home and would become increasingly isolated with few opportunities for personal interaction and connection to community.

As we age our circle of friends continue to diminish through death, retirement and relocation leading to increased isolation at a time when human interaction is vital to our physical and emotional health. Recently I missed a meeting of our Monday Mingle Social Group. I received a number of phone calls

checking out to see if there was anything wrong. I was surprised and touched by this concern this group has for its members. We look out for each other. If a crisis should develop in our lives, I am heartened to know the staff and members of SAGE will rally and help us all through it. Thank you.

MR. KILMNICK:
So I also want to recognize now at this current time it would usually be the Monday Mingle Program that everyone is talking about. And it's just like any other senior center. And I say it's just like any other senior center because before I started LIGALY, you know, I grew up in Far Rockaway Queens. My grandmother was an elected official from New York City. We grew up in a two-family home in the Rockaways. And her big issue was advocating for seniors. So always as a little kid going with her, I was down on the boardwalk where all the senior centers were. And so my first job out of social work school was working at JASA, the Jewish Association for Services for the Aged in Far Rockaway.

And so Monday Mingle is like the lunch programs that I used to work at with JASA minus I don't have to plan the Tigi events. But I also want to -- since now would be Monday Mingle, we asked if folks would come here. And I'm really amazed at how many of the seniors decided to come down on this rainy cold day. So I just want to recognize that we have a lot of our folks out here and thank them for coming as well.

Just to give you another example, and if you have any questions, two years ago in 2007 we started providing services in 2006. In 2007 we approached the County Executive's Office to see if he could provide some funding so that we could have some staff members and go out there and reach the entire county. The County Executive did put us in the budget, but the Suffolk County Legislature removed SAGE Long Island from the budget that year. He had us in for $50,000. And the Legislature removed us. When I talked to some folks afterwards, *they said, well, David, you should have told us that you were involved with SAGE Long Island and we would have left it in.*

But, you know, so we're now here. You know who SAGE Long Island is. We have not been able to get back to that budget again. But we're asking for your help and support in doing so. There are so many seniors across the entire county that cannot get to Bay Shore. And hence our program in Hampton Bays and one that we would like to start in Mattituck up on the North fork and some other places. There are many places that -- Irene is the only staff member for SAGE Long Island. And we get requests to do trainings for other senior centers. Those senior centers that said to us when we asked them for a letter of support *we have none of those,* we want to go there to help them understand that they do have LGBT seniors and how to create -- make their senior centers safer places. Because SAGE Long Island can't be the only thing in Suffolk County, even though we are the only one, we have to make sure that we're creating safer spaces in all of the county senior facilities.

Any questions?

CHAIRMAN STERN:
Legislator Romaine.

LEG. ROMAINE:
Yes, if you would like, contact me. Mattituck is in my district. And I'd be happy to discuss that with you. And you tell me what your plans are and I'll see what I can do, particularly in the upcoming budget, it looks very tight, to ensure that there's sufficient funding to initiate what you hope to do there.

MR. KILMNICK:
Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
Legislator Eddington.

LEG. EDDINGTON:
Yeah, David, the agencies that didn't have *any of that kind*, as some are calling you, you're saying, but are you actively getting information to them anyway? I mean they're in denial, but we can't just allow them to continue to just, you know, they may reach out to you one at a time, but there's hundreds and hundreds of senior organizations. Is there any kind of mailing or is there any other way of -- is there anything we can do to maybe through our County send notices of your existence?

MR. KILMNICK:
Yes. In your package you'll see a monthly newsletter that is produced by Irene. And it gives a listing of the activities that are happening as well as maybe addressing an issue or two. And so I know that we have -- how many people now get that?

MS. TSIKITAS:
It's over 300.

MR. KILMNICK:
Over 300 folks in the County get that newsletter. The Suffolk County Office for the Aging, Holly makes sure that she distributes it as well. I know we've been talking with Holly about working towards getting one of our seniors on the Senior County Advisory Board. So, yeah, we've been reaching out to those organizations and have made progress with some. But change -- education needs to happen and change sometimes can be slow but it's a process.

LEG. EDDINGTON:
Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
Not only is that important and, of course, anything that we can do to be of assistance, please always feel free to let us know. But I'd be particularly interested to see a much greater synergy over time with the organization and your members and the area senior centers. The facility is there. The outreach infrastructure is there. There should certainly be a much better synergy, you know, between the organization and the senior centers that are already within the various communities. So certainly I'm sure my colleagues would agree anything that we can do to help facilitate that communication, that synergy, please let us know. I think that's something that really would be a no-brainer and something that if we all come together, we can certainly help pursue. Very good. Thank you so much for being us today.

I did not receive any cards today. So if there is anybody who would like to address the Committee before we get into our agenda, anybody? Anybody? Seeing none, we'll move to our agenda beginning with Tabled Resolutions.

TABLED RESOLUTIONS

Before us is **IR 1866-10 Adopted Local Law -2010, A Local Law to register non-profit veterans organization in Suffolk County (Cilmi)** This is before us as a public hearing which has been recessed. So motion to table by Legislator Losquadro, second by Legislator Eddington. All in favor? Any opposed? Any abstention? Motion is approved. **(VOTE: 4-0-0-1. LEG. COOPER NOT PRESENT)**

INTRODUCTORY RESOLUTIONS

IR 1899-10, approving the re-appointment of Gene Pritz as a member of the Senior Citizens Advisory Board (Co. Exec.) Gene Pritz currently serves as a member of the Advisory Board. This is a reappointment so he is not with us today. Any motions? Motion to approve by Legislator Losquadro, second by Legislator Eddington. All in favor? Any opposed? Any Abstention? Motion is approved. **(VOTE: 4-0-0-1. LEG. COOPER NOT PRESENT)**

IR 1900-10, approving the re-appointment of Carolyn Gallogly as a member of the Senior Citizens Advisory Board (Co. Exec.) Same motion, same second, same vote. Motion is approved. **(VOTE: 4-0-0-1. LEG. COOPER NOT PRESENT)**

IR 1925-10, Amending the Consultant Services Procurement Policy for non-medical in-home social services providers. (County Executive)

LEG. LOSQUADRO:
Explanation.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
From our Counsel.

MR. NOLAN:
Currently under our present law the Department of Social Services and Health Services can waive RFQ's for these particular services, in-home social services. This would allow any county department to waive the RFQ for this specific service.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
Legislator Romaine.

LEG. ROMAINE:
Question for Counsel. Who's resolution is this?

MR. NOLAN:
The County Executive's resolution.

LEG. ROMAINE:
Okay.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:
Somebody is here waiving their hand.

LEG. ROMAINE:
Hopefully someone from the County Exec's Office can explain the purpose of this. Your office, okay. Holly, maybe you can explain for us the purposes of this resolution.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:
We are under the expanded Home Services Elderly Program. We provide case management directly through our office. But we also provide home care through a number of home care agencies that are in Suffolk County. Because we're not included in this resolution in the way the law stands right now, we have to RFQ out to decide which agencies to use, which doesn't really make a lot of sense. They're licensed by New York State. And what we reimburse them for is done by New York State. So they're already qualified. It's just a matter of who meets our services best at that point. So we would like to be included just as DSS and the Health Department are so we don't have to go through the RFQ process.

LEG. ROMAINE:
I'm going to support this, but is there a standard reimbursement rate the state has? Or does it vary?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:
It varies. There's a very convoluted system that the state has determining what rates they pay. I think it's something to do with their previous year or the previous two years. And they come up

with it. We have nothing to do with what the Medicaid rate is.

LEG. ROMAINE:
But the rate varies from agency to agency? Or is it one standard rate that they --

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:
No, it varies.

LEG. ROMAINE:
So different agencies get different sums of money?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:
Correct.

LEG. ROMAINE:
But you're saying that's not of interest to us since we don't pay the bill.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:
I have to pay -- I have to pay whatever rate is set by the state.

LEG. ROMAINE:
The state sets these rates.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:
The state sets the rate and we reimburse on those rates.

LEG. ROMAINE:
They don't have a standard rate.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:
They have some of kind of system to figure those rates out. And that's way beyond me.

LEG. ROMAINE:
And that depends -- and that varies from agency to agency?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:
Correct.

LEG. ROMAINE:
Who provide the exact same service?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:
Correct.

LEG. ROMAINE:
Maybe, Dan, you can solve that problem.

LAUGHTER

LEG. LOSQUADRO:
I was just going to ask, so you're told by the state what to pay individual providers for the same service? And that rate differs from provider to provider?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Correct.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:
We need to talk later. Thank you.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:
I wish I had more information for you. We just do what we're asked.

LEG. ROMAINE:
For the exact same service.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:
I think it has to do with their expenses and all. There's a whole lot of things that go into that, but it's done by the Department of Health.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:
Pardon me, Mr. Chairman, but you're talking about subsidization of certain businesses versus others. People operating in the same market place with the same fixed costs. One being subsidized to a greater degree than another makes absolutely no sense. I know this is not on you and I don't want to go off on a tangent here, but we'll work on that. Thank you.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:
Okay.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
Certainly we're concerned about that and want to work on it. I just want to ensure just one more time question for Counsel. For purposes of this legislation, approving this resolution would simply make the system consistent for Office for the Aging just like our DSS and our Health Department.

MR. NOLAN:
Right. They already can waive the RFQ. But the Office of Aging is not included in the law presently to be able to do that. So this law would allow Aging and other departments to waive the RFQ.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
Thank you. All right. With that, then, do we have any motions? No motion before us. I'll make a motion to approve.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:
Second.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
Second by Legislator Losquadro. All in favor? Any opposed? Any abstention? Motion is approved. **(VOTE: 4-0-0-1. LEG. COOPER NOT PRESENT)**

That's it for today's agenda. I thank everybody for being with us today.

THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 12:29 PM
{ } DENOTES SPELLED PHONETICALLY