

**VETERANS AND SENIORS COMMITTEE**  
**OF THE**  
**SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE**  
**MINUTES**

A meeting of the Veterans and 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 1, 2012.

**Members Present:**

Legislator Steven Stern - Chairman  
Legislator Sarah Anker - Vice-Chair  
Legislator Tom Barraga  
Legislator DuWayne Gregory  
Legislator Ricardo Montano

**Also In Attendance:**

D.P.O Wayne Horsley – 14<sup>th</sup> Legislative District  
Legislator John Kennedy - 12th Legislative District  
Legislator Tom Cilmi - 10th Legislative District  
George Nolan - Counsel to the Legislature  
Justin Littell - Aide to Legislator D'Amato  
Michael Pitcher - Aide to Presiding Officer Lindsay  
Ben Zwirn - County Executive's Office  
Tom Vaughn - County Executive's Office  
Gail Vizzini - Director Budget Review Office  
Robert Lipp - Deputy Director - Budget Review Office  
Craig Freas - Budget Review Office  
Paul Perillie - Aide to Legislator Gregory  
Kevin LaValle - Aide to Legislator Muratore  
Greg Moran - Aide to Legislator Nowick  
Ali Nazir - Aide to Legislator Kennedy  
Maria Barbara - Aide to Legislator Tom Cilmi  
Rick Brand - Newsday  
All Other Interested Parties

**Minutes Taken and Transcribed By:**

Gabrielle Skolom - Court Stenographer

*(\*The meeting was called to order at 1:08 p.m. \*)*

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Please join me in the Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator Montano.

*(\*Pledge of Allegiance\*)*

And as we keep all our brave men and women fighting for our freedoms overseas in our thoughts and prayers. I also want to take a special moment to -- moment of silence for Judy Stelfox, who is the mother of PFC Larry Stelfox of the New York National Guard Fighting 69th Infantry Regiment, who passed away last week from Lou Gehrig's Disease. Judy was a tireless and dedicated volunteer with the Family Readiness Group and was involved with every aspect of its mission to provide support for our troops and their families. But she was more than just a volunteer. She was a friend, a shoulder to cry on, a helping hand, and steady support for our brave men and women serving our great nation and their families. Her work with FRG kept a lifetime of dedicated service to our community, and she will be greatly missed.

*(\*Moment of Silence Observed\*)*

Thank you. Okay. Thank you, everybody, for being here this afternoon. We have a short agenda. Holly is with us. Welcome, Holly.

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

Good afternoon, everybody. I think I am the agenda; is what it comes down to? *(\*Laughter\*)* I just wanted to give a couple updates on two programs that our office is heavily involved with this time of year. The first program is the Home Energy Assistance Program. As most of you know, we are a subcontractor to Department of Social Services and that we do the applications for those over age 60. The State did the early outreach at the end of August, beginning of September. Since that time, we've received 2900 applications in the office, which is approximately half of what we received over the course of the entire HEAP year. And out of those, we have about 1300 that have been processed and sent over to DSS. The program does not open until November 19, so those applications will be processed, but their payments will not happen until after that date. As of when November 19 comes along, we can then send out applications to those who have not received HEAP in the past. The early mail-out is just for those who received it in other years. So, November 19, that happens. We will send out the applications to those who have requested them from us, and that's when that's open. Emergency HEAP opens on January 2, 2013, for those who require an emergency benefit. Emergency benefits are done through Department of the Social Services. If you have clients who need a HEAP application, they could call our office, and we will take their name and we will do an envelope, and as soon as we can send them out on November 19, they'll go in the mail. So if anybody is requesting it, they can request them from our office.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

So, Holly, the work processing those applications happens now even though checks don't go out until the 19?

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

Correct.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

It's not like the work starts on the 19. The work is happening now.

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

No. As a matter of fact, we try to get as many of these -- we have to get as many of these applications done as quickly as possible because once November 19 comes, then we get another barrage of applications from people when the program actually opens. You should encourage anybody who is eligible to apply. We will do a letter when we get closer to November 19 that goes out to all the Legislators and to community groups telling them what the guidelines are. We don't do that interested parties memo until we get closer to the dates that the program actually opens. I do have some of the guidelines for the program and a minimum of -- you have to have -- income guidelines of \$2,138 or less for a household of one, they would be eligible. It goes up depending on the number of the people in their household. But again we will send that information out prior to November 19 to the Legislative offices and our community groups.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

So procedurally, then, when an application is approved, the way it is right now, a check -- hard-copy check is mailed out to the recipient?

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

No. I believe what it is is that the oil companies receive a payment.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

So it's paid to the provider directly, so nothing actually goes to the resident?

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

That's my understanding. That's all done through DSS. We process the applications to a point, and then they go to DSS for final approval, and then they process payments. Any other questions on HEAP?

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Yeah, I do.

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

And again, if you have anybody calling your office about HEAP, they are more than welcome to call our office, and we'll try to assist them.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Steve, are you done? I have some questions.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Yeah.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Good afternoon. How are you?

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

Good.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

The HEAP grant, how much is available in HEAP money?

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

HEAP is federal, and I think it goes until it runs out. I have no idea how much is available to the County.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Did we not have a County component in HEAP?

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

That hasn't been available for a couple years.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

All right. So that was defunded, but the federal money is still available.

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

The federal money is there. Last year, they cut the federal funding, and the State had to make changes as to how they were going to spend the money that they received from the Feds.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

All right. But we don't know -- I mean, you don't have in front of you the dollar amount. Do you have an estimation of the dollar amount?

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

No, I do not.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Do you know how many people or households are eligible for HEAP funding? Do we have that number?

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

I do not have that number. I know how many we've done in the past. Two years ago, we did 6600 applications for those over age 60. Last year was about 5800, but one of the reasons why it's gone down is because if you have food stamps, you're automatically enrolled in the HEAP program, and you don't have to do an application. So we've done a big push to get people enrolled in food stamps, and then they were automatically enrolled in HEAP. So that has decreased the number of applications we're doing through our office.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

That sounds very good.

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

Yeah, it's been really very helpful to people who are in need, you know, to get them enrolled in those benefits.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Yeah, no, I agree, and that's the point I was going to make. So aside from those that are on food stamps, do you have an idea of what the universe is of those people -- is there any way of ascertaining what the universe is?

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

That may be a question for Department of Social Services. I would have to check with them. I don't have that number.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Here's what I'm getting at: I'd like to know what that universe is and what the percentage of families in that universe are getting HEAP benefits because I think the problem is how do you reach all of the eligible participants and get them to apply if this program is based on you submitting an application. You follow what I'm saying?

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

I do. Again, I'm a subcontractor of the Department of Social Services.

*(\*Laughter\*)*

I do not know the answer to that. I could check it out. I'll ask --

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Can you get me that, or is that something that I should direct to Social Services? I think it'd be better if you can get it because --

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

I can see if I could try to get an answer to that because I really don't know what the universe is for that. And you want universe of everybody or over age 60?

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Well, no, there are two universes here. One universe is all of those that are eligible, but in that universe, you said that people that are receiving food stamps don't have to apply, so we're going to subtract those from the universe. The universe, I mean all the eligible families or households in Suffolk --

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

That's my question. Are you looking for the entire population that's eligible in Suffolk County? Because that's different from the population that I serve, so I'm just curious.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

I'd like to get really -- well, the easiest way to do the math is, simply, what's the entire universe? How many are serviced or how many are taken care of by or as a result of them receiving food stamps? The difference in that is how many eligible are left that can be serviced, and then the question is how many of those are, in fact, either applying or being serviced by the HEAP benefits, because that'll tell me how many families we're missing. Is that a fair assumption?

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

I'll see what numbers they have.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

We'll talk next time. Thanks.

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

Just so you know, from our perspective in our office, we have done a lot of outreach over the last couple years to try to reach people for these programs. We do what we call the HEAP save forms. They are green sheets. We have sent those out. We do about 10,000 a year that we send out to clients or people that we have on mailing lists to let them know about different programs that are available in Suffolk County. So we have done quite an extensive outreach on our part to try to get to people but --

**LEG. MONTANO:**

I know you've done a good job, but my point is that there's --

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

-- there's always more.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

There's always a group that, even if you reach out to them, for some reason, don't fill out the application, put it on the side, miss the deadline, and these are families in many cases that can well benefit from the program. And then the other problem you have is that you can't service every family out there because you have limited funds. Am I correct in that?

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

That is correct. When the funding runs out, it runs out.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

It's first come, first serve.

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

Correct.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

And it's not -- so if we're missing communities or if we're missing people or we're missing needy people, first come, first serve means you're out, and that's what I'm trying to get at. How many people are out, because we may even need to supplement the HEAP funding as we did if we have the money years ago. I think that was Legislator Horsley's bill; am I correct on that? So these are the questions. If we're going to talk about HEAP, and particularly in this economy, I'd like to get those figures. Now, I know it's probably not in your department. If you could steer us in the right direction in terms of if you can get them for us, that would be great. If you can't, send me an e-mail, and we'll make the request of Social Services to the extent they can give it to us. I'd like to know that.

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

Well, I'll reach out to DSS and see what they have for me.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Thanks, Holly. I appreciate it.

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

The -- I think that when the County had its plan, I think it was for those who were in just a slightly higher income, so they reached the people who are just over the edge.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Right. Exactly. It was hitting more of those that were not eligible for HEAP but certainly in need of the benefits.

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

Correct. Any other questions on HEAP before I go on to the health insurance? The second program I wanted to talk about was the Medicare Part D program. The open enrollment period for that starts October 15 and goes through December 7. Years ago, it used to be a little bit later and then it would go to December 31, but they realized it created a lot of havoc to have it open around the holidays and, you know, people not being able to get the information they needed. So it's October 15 to December 7. There's 28 Part D plans in New York State, and they range from having zero deductibles to having higher deductibles. There's ones that have zero premiums; there are ones that have higher premiums; and the word that you need to get to your constituents is that even if they're happy with the plan they have right now, they really should look at the plan and compare it to other plans because you never know what has changed in the specific plan that they have; you know, with the price, whether the drugs are covered, the formulas change each year. They can go to Medicare.gov. They can call 1-800-MEDICARE, or they can call our office and we'll try to assist

them with -- what the plans they have. In order for them to receive assistance with trying to figure out a plan even if they go to Medicare.gov or if they're on a phone call to Medicare or our office, they need to know what drugs they are taking. They need to know exactly what the prescription is, and that way, that information can be put into the website. The website, for those who are computer-literate, it's much easier than it used to be, but you have to have the information available in order to make a reasoned decision. So if you can get that word out to your constituents, that would be great.

EPIC is back this year as well. EPIC was supposed to be phased out and EPIC came back again. They have fee plans, deductible plans again, and they will pay for part of the Part D premiums for those who are in the fee plans. They will have a deductible credit -- I mean credit for those in the deductible plans, so EPIC is back for those who are eligible based on the income. The income goes up to 23,000 for a single for the fee plan and 29,000 for married --

**LEG. MONTANO:**

What is EPIC?

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Helps make drugs.

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

-- and 35,000 for single and 50,000 for deductible. So there's a lot of information that's out there for those who are looking for help with their insurance right now. And if they call for our office again, we'll try to assist them as best as we can.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

EPIC stands for what?

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

I knew you would ask me some hard question.

*(\*Laughter\*)*

No one knows what it stands for, including me. It just -- Elderly Pharmaceutical --

**LEG. GREGORY:**

Insurance.

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

-- Insurance. We'll make it up.

*(\*Laughter\*)*

**LEG. GREGORY:**

(Inaudible) They eliminated that.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Thank you.

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

I don't remember. That was a trick question. Any other real questions?

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Just briefly, what would be the process, then? So for those that are out of EPIC or were never in EPIC --

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

If they meet the income guidelines, EPIC is a very good program to be in because it does provide assistance to them for their fees and for some of their deductibles. It's definitely worthwhile if you are eligible for it. You have to be in a Part D plan, though, in order to be in EPIC as well.

**LEG. ANKER:**

EPIC stands for Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage.

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

Ah, there we go. We were close. Couldn't get the "C" part. So if they have a Part D plan and EPIC is something that they might be interested in, the application is very simple for EPIC, so they can request an application, and if they have questions as to how it will cover, we can help them with that. And EPIC also has a pretty good hotline that they could call as well if they need to know how it wraps around the Part D plans, so either way.

**LEG. ANKER:**

Holly, remember when you came over to Leisure Village and they had an incredible concern about the -- I think they mentioned the donut hole --

*(\*Chairman Stern and Legislator Montano exited the meeting. \*)*

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

They did. The donut hole is shrinking this year. The portable healthcare aspect -- the donut is shrinking this year. The donut hole is from \$2,970 to \$4,750, and when they are in that donut hole, about 48 percent of the cost, they would have to cover themselves. And then they would get the coverage again after they are over the \$4,750, so it's a big help for those who are, you know, the ones we saw last year who were paying \$300 versus the \$30 they were paying for coverage.

**LEG. ANKER:**

Absolutely.

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

I don't know if anybody needs anything from me. Yes, no. Once, twice, three times.

*(\*Chairman Stern and Legislator Montano re-entered the meeting. \*)*

**D.P.O. HORSLEY:**

What's the whipped cream that is supposed to cure the donut hole? Swear to God. No, but that's technical language. It will (inaudible) -- supposed to cure the donut --

**MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:**

I have no idea what you're talking about.

*(\*Laughter\*)*

**D.P.O. HORSLEY:**

Good. I didn't, either.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Holly, thank you. Anybody else? We are adjourned.

*(\*Meeting adjourned at 1:23 p.m. \*)*