

VETERANS & SENIORS COMMITTEE

OF THE

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

Minutes

A regular 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 Monday, April 21, 2014 at 12:30 p.m.

Members:

Legislator Steve Stern - Chairman
Legislator Thomas Barraga
Legislator Al Krupski
Legislator Tom Muratore

Not Present:

Legislator Anker - Excused Absence

Also in Attendance:

Debbie Harris - Aide to Legislator Stern
Tom Ronayne - Director, Veterans Services Agency
Holly Rhodes-Teague - Director, Office for the Aging
Kirk Cronk - Development & Communications Manager, Easter Seals
Mike Haynes - Long Island Cares, Government Affairs
Bruce Blower - Commission on Quality of Care Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities
Patrick Kalvin
Vincent Trypuc
All Other Interested Parties

Minutes Taken By:

Kevin Gruebel - Court Reporter

Minutes Transcribed By:

Kim Castiglione - Legislative Secretary

*(*The meeting was called to order at 12:35 p.m. *)*

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the committee on Veterans and Seniors. Can I ask everybody to please rise and join us in the Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator Krupski.

Salutation

And if you would remain standing and join in a moment of silence and keep all of our brave men and women fighting for our freedoms overseas in our thoughts and prayers.

(Moment of Silence)

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Thank you. Again, welcome everyone. For the record, Legislator Anker is not with us today. She has an excused absence. We don't have legislative items on the agenda today but we do have presentations. Let's start with Holly.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

I don't have a lot to report, but I thought you might want to know that under the New York State budget that was just passed, our office received some very good news. There was a huge legislative push by a lot of the aging agencies in New York State and they were able to have an additional \$5 million statewide to put into the State budget. The funding is for community services to the elderly, which is the most flexible funding stream that generally comes through our office. So the five million statewide will be distributed through the area agencies on aging, which we're very happy about.

I think the push was really set upon a waiting list throughout the State for a lot of different services, so when we do receive our final allocation we'll be able to figure out how we're going to distribute that funding. I assume a good portion of that would probably go out to contractors, but we're very happy to hear that. It's the first time in quite a long time that there was a substantial increase in funding in the State budget for aging services. And as you all know, our older population is jumping, so we're very excited about that.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Holly, when will we find out what the dollar amount is and how we're going to be able to distribute it.

MS. RHODES-TEAGUE:

We have to wait for the State office, I think, to do their allocation schedules. We haven't received that yet. And then obviously once it comes into our office I would have to do a resolution to put that money into the County budget so that we can either contract or spend it direct, one way or the other. It'll probably be another month or two, I would think, before we hear from the State. You know, we haven't received our allocations under our normal grants yet, so we're waiting. But we're excited about it. I just thought you all might want to hear that. It's all good news.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Good news. Thank you. Anybody for Holly? All right. Holly, thank you. Director Ronayne.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Good afternoon. First, I'd like to give you as much notice as possible so I'll start -- I'll begin with this. May 17th at 12 noon, Armed Forces Plaza, we will once again be hosting Suffolk County's Annual Armed Forces Day Ceremonies. Certainly invitations will be arriving probably early next week, but May 17th, which is a Saturday, 12 noon at Armed Forces Plaza. We look forward to seeing all of you there.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Thank you, but some of us have daughters graduating from college that day and will be unable to make it.

(Laughter)

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Also coming up, and I apologize, Legislator Stern, I don't have the date with me, but we have been working with Legislator Stern or Chairman Stern's office to help get the word out on the Month of the Military Child. The event is fast approaching at Monster Mini Golf on Commack Road in Deer Park.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

On May 10th.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

May 10th. I have been to the event in the past, it is a lot of fun. It would be great to see that building filled with children on that day.

May 23rd at the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Northport is a very special ceremony. They're going to be dedicating the Wall of Wars, which is a series of monuments that have been installed to represent each of the wars or actions that our nation has fought, and it is shaping up to be a very special ceremony. I believe it's also going to be on the larger side, somewhere between 500 and 1,000 people. I will ensure that each of you receive individual invitations, but please mark your calendars.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Tom, what is the date?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

May 23. Also coming up on May 7th, Legislator Spencer will be hosting his first annual Veterans Appreciation Breakfast. That will be held on May 7th, again, at Larkfield Manor. I believe that that is limited to veterans residing within Legislator Spencer's district or at least within the Town of Huntington. But I will be following up with him actually after today's session so we can send out at an e-mail update on the particulars related to that.

Just one piece of housekeeping good news. It doesn't directly affect Suffolk County, but I'm happy to announce that the Governor in his -- the budget that was recently signed, did add yet one additional county to the Joseph Dwyer Peer Support Program. I like to think that when counties are added to that program it in some way is a reflection on the work that has been done here in Suffolk County. And that brings us to a total of 12 counties in the State now, the newest being Monroe County, which is significant because it is an area with a fairly large veterans population. It's up in the Rochester area. There is a city, there's a population density up there. They could really benefit from a program like this. I'm very happy about that.

We have been getting a lot of inquiry regarding the State's efforts to allow local school boards or local school districts to opt into the expansion of the veterans real property tax exemption. It's been largely well received. There have been some districts, if I'm not mistaken, as of on Friday in Suffolk County 37 districts have voted on the measure; 24 of the 37 have adopted it. Obviously the remaining have not, but there are an awful lot more districts yet to vote. We are hearing from more of them now, I think. The pressure is somewhat off. The State deadline for filing for real property tax exemption is March first for the following tax year. Everybody who was able to get in prior to March first this benefit would become effective in the 2015 school year.

Now that we have passed March first, any districts who come in now before next March first are actually looking at the 2016 school year. So the pressure is off a little bit, which allows some of these districts more time to research and better understand the financial implications of the law. But it has been largely well received. There has been some question about the methodology behind making this a local measure and not a State measure, but that's really not our argument. I just wanted to make you aware that we have been receiving a lot of contact, both from veterans in the community and from the various school districts themselves with questions and clarifications. So it's a fairly involved piece of legislation. It's short but there's a lot of technical aspects to it. If anybody has any specific questions I'd be happy to address those offline.

One of the other things that we were able to do, we were asked to participate last week with Senator Gillibrand in a press conference to announce legislation that actually tracks very well with a discussion that we have had in this committee many times. That is the issue of personality disorder and adjustment disorder discharges or separations that seem to have been occurring in unusually high numbers during the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. The Senator's office was able to compile some numbers that I had not been able to get my hands on, and according to the Senator, in the past nine years we have had more than 130,000 service members separated from service with administrative personality or adjustment disorder discharges.

The reason that that is significant is firstly these discharges seem to be a vehicle that is being employed more and more often to remove service members who are suffering from a variety of conditions that it seems, and our research is beginning to bear this out fairly strongly, that in many, many instances the behavioral or disciplinary issues that resulted in the administrative separations from service actually manifested after the service member's first exposure to a combat experience. And in many, many cases we are finding that, or we believe at least, that these behaviors were, in fact, manifestations of an undiagnosed PTSD. Many of these individuals are going on to receive these diagnoses post-service.

The reason that that is significant is that almost entirely this population when they receive discharges of this nature, they are other than honorable discharges. And as such, most of these individuals are precluded from accessing the VA for services. So in as much as these behaviors appear to be related to their service connected PTSD, they do not have access to the host of medical and other services that most veterans do enjoy. So legislation has been passed, or has been introduced I should say, that would have the composition of the boards who consider these separations reevaluated for their structure.

A good example is I met with an Army veteran, a soldier who was in attendance at the request of the Senator. And in my conversation with him it turned out that not only was he released from service for what they considered to be a serious act, and I'll circle back to that in a moment, but after his administrative discharge under other than honorable conditions, he was actually able to articulate an argument for himself and presented before the Board of Discharge Upgrade. He was denied his discharge upgrade at the board. And the real tragedy in this individual's story, and I think it's not atypical of what we're seeing with this population, the serious misconduct that resulted in his administrative discharge from the Army in the first place occurred while he was visiting a monument that had been erected on the base where he and his unit had been deployed from. His unit suffered very heavy casualties. They had been engaged in a lot of heavy combat. And when the monument on their base was erected bearing the names of those who had been lost from his unit, he used to spend time and visit his friends as close as he was able and reflect on their deployments together, and he said that he would speak to his friends, that was where he would go to communicate with them.

On one of his visits he chose to bring a bottle of alcohol and a bottle of percocet and he OD'd. He attempted to take his own life at the monument. He felt that by dying at the monument that he would be able to die with his brothers. That attempted suicide was the serious misconduct that was the catalyst for his separation from service. There was no effort made to have him psychiatrically

diagnosed, which he did do after the fact and he was given a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder by a civilian physician after he was separated from service. That's just one example of what seems to be an unjust application of the personality and adjustment disorder standard that they're applying.

The other that I think really is striking, and this goes to largely to the heart of the Senator's legislation, is that when he appeared at the Discharge Review Board for his discharge upgrade, the medical doctor -- not the medical doctor but the medical representative on the board who interviewed him and cast the deciding vote, and this individual voted not in favor of upgrading his discharge, they kept the status of his discharge at other than honorable. The individual diagnosing or assessing his psychiatric or psychological state at the time of his incident, of his serious offense, which was the attempted suicide, was in fact not a mental health professional, but a podiatrist. As it turns out there is no mandate that these boards have a medical professional who is expert in the field in which they are evaluating.

So we would ask that certainly in an instance such as that that a mental health professional or such appropriate person, based on what they're reviewing, be a member of that panel.

We have taken it a step further and we've asked the Senator to consider adding language that would also include on these panels a senior level veterans advocate. The reason for that is when these administrative discharges are processed, the majority of these individuals receiving them leave service without veteran status, regardless of what they're service has been, regardless of their exposure to combat, regardless of all other things. The nature of that discharge defines what they will or will not be eligible for post-service, and by not achieving veteran status they do not have access to VA, they do not have access to offices such as ours. We follow the same guideline as the VA in terms of eligibility.

So they're really, when the cord is cut with these individuals they're really in the wind with no access to traditional resources and I think that does a tremendous disservice to these individuals. If there were somebody expert in the field of veteran services, programs and benefits, there are individual benefits that they may continue to be eligible for. It's unreasonable to think that the average person would be able to navigate and determine for themselves what those services are, so the presence of a veterans advocate I think would be a strong addition and work strongly toward a positive outcome for these individuals.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Tom, when there's a reviewing board in this kind of a situation, how many members are there of the board?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

It can be from three to five.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And when the veteran or the person that's been discharged is given the opportunity to be heard before this board, do they traditionally represent themselves or do they bring in some type of advocate to advocate on their behalf?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

They have the right to present either an attorney to represent them or an advocate to speak on their behalf. The majority of these individuals tend -- well, the majority of these individuals tend to not seek upgrade in the first place. Those who do, it seems tend -- they try to do this on their own and it's not a user friendly process, I can assure you. In the best of circumstances when we assist with discharge upgrades it's typically a three to five year process. It's burdensome and it's just not a process that I would want to have to go through without a background in just what that process is.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Who makes up these boards? How does one become appointed to this review board?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

The Department of Defense through the individual branches. Department of the Navy would be responsible for the Navy and the Marine Corp, Department of the Air Force, Department of the Army for their respective memberships and the Coast Guard has their own.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Are these service members or are they civilians?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

No, they are service members, so the addition of an advocate would be a change in protocol at least.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

The advocate position could be held by a civilian.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

That's what we would advocate for, that's what we would hope, yes.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

So when you point to the example of the podiatrist, the podiatrist is a service member.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Yes.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And so there's legislation that's pending right now. Do you happen to know who initiated it and where does it stand right now?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

It's being introduced. Senator Gillibrand is the co-author of it.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Okay. So it's being introduced in the Senate.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Yes.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Do you know if there is a house number?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I don't know the number yet.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Okay. All right. Very good. Anything else for the Director? Director, as always, thank you.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Okay. It is my pleasure to welcome Kirk Cronk, who is the manager of Development and Communications for Easter Seals, an organization that many of us are familiar with. Kirk is here specifically today to talk about some of the initiatives that are being put forth by the organization,

particularly when it comes to employment issues and initiatives for our veterans. So Kirk, welcome.

MR. CRONK:

Thank you very much, Chairman Stern. I'm glad to be here today to give the committee an update of what's going on with Easter Seals and veterans. I brought something with me. The, stenographer, for his benefit I'll describe it. It's a photograph that was given to a gentleman named Vincent Trypuc upon his retirement from County service. In the photo with him and his guide dog is Bruce Blower and former County Executive Steve Halpin.

Mr. Trypuc worked for many years in the Consumer Affairs Department for the County. He is a gentleman who lost his sight during his service to his country during the Second World War. And he used to get on the bus every day from Patchogue and ride the bus with his dog up here to Hauppauge and work every day. It's sort of symbolic of the kind of people that Easter Seals helps, because we've worked with people with disabilities for many years and we've also worked with the veterans for many years.

The program for veterans has been very, very active in the City and in the Upstate area, and we are taking steps to expand that program out here to Long Island. We've established our first site for the program called Vets To Jobs and it's operating right now out of an American Legion Hall over in Elmont where we have a counselor working for us. And we've actually applied for some grants, one with the Long Island Community Foundation, and we're working on some others to get additional funding for that because the need is very great out here in Suffolk and I want to bring that out here to Suffolk.

During my time at the Labor Department I worked on some figures and I discovered that Suffolk County has the highest percentage of veterans of any county in New York State, and not by a little bit, by a good margin. It's one of the highest counties in percentage of veterans in the entire country. I think it comes in at number 12 or 13. So the need is here and Easter Seals is trying to work with the population on that.

We've done a lot of work on vocational training and so this kind of is a natural progression out of that but with some additional wrinkles. There's basically three veterans employment programs that we are involved with. One is called the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program, another one called the Homeless Female Veterans and Veterans With Families Reintegration Program. And the third one is Vets To Jobs, the difference being is the Vets To Jobs person does not have to be homeless to work with us on that. They just need to want to get a job. The other programs are geared towards veterans and veterans with families and female veterans to help them get established in a residence as well as them get employment.

We find that, and I think it might be interesting to note to the committee, that female veterans are kind of a special case because they often don't apply for veteran services because they've often had a negative experience in the military and don't identify themselves that way. So we have to do different kinds of outreach to reach the female veterans. And that's coming from the caseworkers, not from me personally, but that seems to be the case.

So, we're working very hard to get the program up and running. We've already established links with various businesses that are interested in hiring veterans on a regular basis, so they send us their job openings. During my time at the Labor Department I discovered there is a lot of businesses that like to hire veterans because they feel veterans are good employees, especially the manufacturing companies. There are on Long Island 3300 manufacturing firms. People don't realize that because you don't see smokestacks, you don't see parts coming in and a huge machine coming out, but here on Long Island we make a lot of things. And sometimes the companies are 25 people, but sometimes they're 400 people.

There's a company over in Medford on Route 112 that makes camshafts using high-tech equipment. They actually undercut the Chinese because they don't have to beat the price, they just have to meet the price because they don't have to ship it from China, and the owner/manager of that company loves to hire veterans. He feels veterans are good employees. I know that companies are looking for veterans, so part of our job, I guess, is sort of a matchmaker, to bring those veterans to the employers. Also to give them the kind of upgrade of skills and also help to match the skills, because they often come out of the service and they don't know how their military skills apply to civilian life. So one of the things you'll see is that we will go and work with them and try and find out how that best works. Can I answer any questions for you?

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Krupski.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

Thank you. So you said a high percentage of -- Suffolk has a very high percentage of veterans.

MR. CRONK:

Highest percentage of veterans population of any county in New York State. It's about eight percent.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

And maybe if you don't know, I know the man behind you will know. Are they all work age? Or are some of them past the age where you'd consider them as part of the major workforce.

MR. CRONK:

Well, you know, that's all veterans, so I don't know what you would consider, you know, work age. Depending on a person's profession, people can sometimes work to, you know --

LEG. KRUPSKI:

My father's 86 and he says he's middle-aged, so I know what you're saying. I was just curious.

MR. CRONK:

It's a normal balance of population on that. But we had quite a few of our young people volunteer for military service over the past few years. There are some communities out here on Long Island that have a pretty high percentage, especially some of the poorer communities, because when the economy wasn't doing so well, and it's barely coming out of that now, that was a good source for employment. I know one family where there were -- the man had three sons and two of them went into the military and have just recently come out. But they're coming out and they're now looking for work. You know, these were pretty good fellows. Both of them were Eagle Scouts.

LEG. KRUPSKI:

So the people, then, that grew up in the County then came back after their service.

MR. CRONK:

Yes.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Muratore.

LEG. MURATORE:

You said you were based in Elmont right now.

MR. CRONK:

Yes. There's a -- we're operating a site out of -- we're actually renting some space in an American Legion Hall in Elmont. We're trying to keep the overhead costs low.

LEG. MURATORE:

So you have nothing in Suffolk County, though.

MR. CRONK:

Not yet.

LEG. MURATORE:

So how do our veterans --

MR. CRONK:

But as our funding develops that will happen. You see, in the City and in Upstate we have grants that help fund the program. There's nothing like that yet out here on Long Island, but we are moving as quickly as we can in terms of funding and in personnel to establish that.

LEG. MURATORE:

So how do our vets get to your site, either on their own -- they need their own transportation?

MR. CRONK:

At this point, yes, which is why we want to locate in places where there is as much public transportation as possible because sometimes transportation is a real issue for them, especially somebody who is homeless. You know, going back to my experience across the street at the Labor Department, I remember I had a job available for a young man one time and he had no way to get to it. You know, it's just heartbreaking. You know, here's a job, it's available, but he had no way to get from here in Hauppauge to Central Islip to where the job was. So those are types of challenges people face, especially, you know, when they come down on their luck. Like I say, a lot of the newer veterans these days are young people who went in because that was the best economic opportunity that they had at the time coming out of high school or even college. Now the ones that came out of the college, they certainly have their college education, but the ones that came from high school found no jobs available, went into the service, are now coming out and they're as poor as they were when they went in, but they have some skills now and some abilities and they've had a position of responsibility which could make them somebody that an employer would want.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Kirk, so right now how many people that are associated with the Vets To Jobs Program are there? How many people do you have at Easter Seals who are focused on this aspect of the work?

MR. CRONK:

Are you talking statewide or just out here on the Island?

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Out here.

MR. CRONK:

Out here on the Island right now there's one person because it's just getting established and we're trying to get the funding. You know, in the City there's a whole large office with all kinds of people. Upstate, in Rochester, Syracuse, there's a large program. We want to duplicate that kind of success here. If you go into the Labor Department in New York City and you're a veteran and you need help, they send you to Easter Seals of New York.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Is that right.

MR. CRONK:

They do. So we don't have to advertise, we sort of get referrals, you know, which is always the best kind of business, and we want to see that happen out here. So we are out there getting the

word around. I spoke on a couple of the radio stations. I am going to a radio station on Saturday morning bright and early and speaking about the program because, like I said, we keep the overhead low, and so if we have to spend a lot of money on advertising that's not money that's used for helping the veterans.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Certainly if there are materials that explain what it is the organization does and how can you be of assistance and if there's anything that we can do in each of our individual offices to help get that word out, I'm sure my colleagues would agree that this is something that we would certainly love to be helpful with.

One of the programs here that is mentioned is the Homeless Female Veterans, along with the Veterans With Families Reintegration Program. How do you find that particular challenge as it relates to female service members out here or at least in the general metropolitan area.

MR. CRONK:

One of the saddest stories is one of the vets came back and he had his family now, which I guess had lived on base housing, but when he left the service he lived temporarily with his family, but then that didn't work out. You know, the story is that he and his family had to ride the subways to keep warm. So we will, in that case and other cases at least get temporary housing for them. We are not in the business of providing permanent housing. Our goal is to give them the temporary housing, get them a job and get them a permanent housing situation.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And as it relates to female members of the services, do you find that -- is it a large challenge out here? Do you see much of a call for it?

MR. CRONK:

I'd say there is as much as there is in other parts. Like I say, one of the challenges of that is reaching out to the female veterans because of the feeling on many of their parts that they have various negative experiences for whatever reason, and they don't identify themselves as veterans the way that the men veterans do. It's almost like they -- it's sort of a denial thing. You know, I mean, certainly we've seen things in the press about sexual harassment or those problems or whatever it was, so they don't identify themselves that way. So our challenge there is to do extra efforts to reach out to that group.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And how has it been working with the VA here? They're aware of your services, you've had an opportunity to have conversations?

MR. CRONK:

Certainly. The VA more importantly is establishing relationships with the Labor Departments. I know here in Suffolk County, their Labor Department, they make veterans a priority. There is a program and there is a list, the veterans go to the front of that list. But there are people in there that come and do counseling, specific people from different outside groups, and it occurred to me that maybe we might at some point approach the County and see whether somebody from Vets To Jobs could actually occupy some space at least one day a week over here at the Labor Department in Hauppauge.

That's doesn't totally solve the problem because, you know, I have always said that Suffolk County is the long in Long Island. As Legislator Krupski will tell you, it's a bit of a ride. So getting something established out east, whether it's in Riverhead or, you know, if we end up renting a certain spot in Yaphank, you know, getting an office in there, because it's an outreach thing. We wish public transportation was as wonderful as it could be, but it's lacking. And out east the people who need jobs need jobs, but there's also, in my opinion, a labor shortage out east, and it's going to

be growing because as the industrial base out there grows, as manufacturing grows because of the railhead, you have a population out there that was basically focused on two industries, which was tourism and farming, which is wonderful, but if you now put a manufacturing plant there now you have to train the people to man that plant. Having a plant and land and capital is wonderful, but people are what make the business run. And certainly that's one of the reasons from a businessman's standpoint, selfish reasons to want to help veterans, because he can get good employees, and smart businessmen realize that and the other ones will catch on eventually, too.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Muratore.

LEG. MURATORE:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Cronk, have you reached out to any veteran, VFW Halls, the town, the County, looking for a spot?

MR. CRONK:

Of course we have the spot in Nassau. I haven't done that yet in Suffolk. We're doing some changes in the staffing on the program. I want to make sure that that's firmly established, but we have been reaching out. It's a question of transportation right now. There was a part-time slot available but it wasn't economically feasible for somebody from Suffolk to come out to Elmont on that basis, but we will be doing that. It's just a matter of time, because the need is here and this is what we do and we're good at what we do.

LEG. MURATORE:

Well, if we have eight percent of the veterans of course we need you here. I mean, shouldn't we have gotten the choice over Nassau? Shouldn't we have started here first and then gone into Elmont?

MR. CRONK:

If I was there I would have advocated for that. I came on board Easter Seals in January, and I think what made it available was someone in the organization was a member of the American Legion Hall there in Elmont and I think we're paying a grand total of maybe a hundred dollars a week rent, which made it very attractive. You know, when you are getting a program up and running initially you keep that overhead low. Then, you know, as you establish your funding then you can do more expansion. For example, you know, like I said, we applied to the LICF for a grant and we'll be doing some others, as well as our own fundraising. It's always nice to have some grant money to start off with.

So we certainly have not forgotten Suffolk. I lived in Brentwood and Lindenhurst and Setauket and I love Suffolk County, I want to help Suffolk County. I know Easter Seals does, too. A lot of our board members are from Suffolk County. One of the biggest employers out here, J and B Restaurants, which is Friendly's, is one of our board members. As a matter of fact, you should go there and give a dollar to Easter Seals and get yourself a 10 percent coupon off before the end of the month. So we've got a lot of things going on, and our board members from here, from Long Island, are interested in Long Island and are interested in Suffolk County.

LEG. MURATORE:

What if we got one of the American Legion Halls to say to you, well, come and use our hall for free. You know, I mean, what if they gave you a spot. I know the one in Centereach is very active. Maybe I can speak with them and they might have a spot, a corner for you to put some of your people in and work out of there. Or you just don't have the staff to do it.

MR. CRONK:

Well, you know what? It's the kind of thing where even if our staff is limited at this point doesn't mean that they can't spend part of the week in Nassau and part of the week in Suffolk. So there

could be certain days, you know, at least to get the thing up and running. I know a good many of the counselors that work at the Labor Department from different organizations are only there one or two days a week, then they're elsewhere. I'm very happy to hear about that and I'd love to hear more about that. I'll let you have my card and we'll talk about that. I'm glad to hear about that.

LEG. MURATORE:

So are you here to look for grant money or are you here to look -- I mean, what's the purpose today?

MR. CRONK:

Part of my job is communications, so it's getting the word out. The other part is development, which means I'm looking for money, too. So if I can come out of here with getting the word out and getting some support in a more substantial way then I'm really happy and my boss would be, too.

LEG. MURATORE:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Barraga.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Kirk, I think the advantage with the people of Suffolk County is that you are now in that position because, you know, you spent many years at the Department of Labor. We have very, very close contact in terms of possible employment for potential individuals in my direct, but the fact that you're with Easter Seals and this demand exists in Suffolk County for veterans, you're bringing in a voice that they maybe haven't heard before. So there is no doubt in my mind as the months go ahead they'll be expansion in Suffolk County because you know Suffolk County. You know the hamlets, you know the services, you know the departments, you know the agencies, and that has to benefit Easter Seals and all veterans of Suffolk County.

So I'm very happy that you've landed on your feet as they say, and you've got, you know, a real solid position with Easter Seals and you can be very, very productive for the people of Suffolk County and the veterans of Suffolk County in that capacity. I'm sure that will be the case as we go forward.

MR. CRONK:

Thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Of course this is critically important information for all of us to know, where the organization is at and what you're capable of doing and what you're looking to do in the future along the way, and perhaps with some of our assistance as well. The Director and I have this conversation all the time. We're talking about the services that are our veterans need the most, and of course we talk about social services and we talk about health care or we talk about therapy, but what we hear from veterans over and over again of course is assistance with employment. So this type of a program is critically important to our veterans, particularly here in Suffolk County. So I thank you for being with us today and sharing information and please if we could be of assistance along the way always feel free to let us know.

MR. CRONK:

I will do that. Thank you very much. Thank you Members of the committee.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Okay. Anybody else? All right. There being no other business before the committee, we are

adjourned. Thank you.

(*The meeting was adjourned at 1:17 p.m. *)