

**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 September 2, 2014.

**Members Present:**

Legislator Stern - Chairman  
Legislator Barraga - Vice-Chair  
Legislator Anker  
Legislator Muratore

**Also In Attendance:**

Lora Gellerstein - Chief Deputy Clerk  
George Nolan - Counsel to the Legislature  
Tom Ronayne - Director of Veteran's Services  
Roger Leathers - Services for the Underserved  
Rick Brand - Newsday  
All Other Interested Parties

**Minutes Taken and Transcribed By:**

Gabrielle Severs - Court Stenographer

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(\*The meeting was called to order at 11:06 a.m.\*)

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the committee on Veterans and Seniors. Please rise and join us in the Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator Barraga.

(\*Salutation\*)

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

(\*Moment of Silence Observed\*)

Good morning, everyone. It's good to see my colleagues here after a break over the summer. Hope everybody had a safe and enjoyable one. It's good to see everybody joining us here today. We do have a presentation today. Before we go to welcome our guests today, we'll go to Director Ronayne. While we're waiting for the director to take his spot, Legislator Krupski will not be with us today. He has an excused absence.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Members. Thank you, as always, for the invitation to join you here today. As the summer winds down and we get back into the post-Labor Day swing of things, I've got a fairly short presentation this morning. I did want to specifically make mention of a program that we are planning, if this makes any sense. I'm actually quite looking forward to it. We'll be doing a community town-hall sort of meeting focusing specifically on veterans PTSD and suicide. The forum will take the form or take the shape of a brief number of introductions and introductory remarks followed by a screening of a film. The name of the film is *Memorial Day*. The film runs about 90 minutes. Following the film, we will have a panel to engage in a discussion and a Q and A session with members of the audience. The invitees to the audience to the event will be certainly our veterans community but very specifically the family members and other loved ones of our veterans, so it's very important to have those folks as part of this discussion; and then, obviously, any remaining space, we would welcome very much the members of the general public. This will take place on October 8. The screening will be taking place at the Suffolk County Community College Brentwood campus. Right now, it appears we have been able to secure the Van Nostrand theater, so we have an outstanding for the event, and I think it's very timely. I think it's a very important program for us to be conducting with our community.

As we have seen in the past several years, our suicide number do tend to increase. They take up during this last quarter. We've noticed this trend over the last several years. I could tell you that we've had at least two successful and one very serious attempted suicide in the month of August, so it seems to be following suit. The trend appears to be continuing. This is very timely, and I would like at this time to extend an invitation to you, Mr. Chairman, and all of the members of the committee to join us, certainly with our Presiding Officer, to join us that evening. I think it will be enlightening, and I think it would be an opportunity for us to hear in a less formal setting what the concerns are of this population of their families. They can articulate these concerns far better than I. They are living it every day, so please keep that on your calendar; beginning at 6:00 p.m., Van Nostrand theater at Suffolk Community College.

Another event that we have planned just a little bit before that is --

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Tom?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

Sir.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Have you seen the film?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

I have not. I plan to watch it this weekend.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

What's the title of it?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

*Memorial Day.*

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

It deals with PTSD and the families, how they are dealing with it?

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

I've had the film explained to me. Several people on the panel have already screened the film. I plan to watch it this coming weekend. Essentially it's the story of a soldier who returns home from Iraq a very changed person, the challenges and struggles that he experiences; and it focuses on the different reactions and responses of the family members, some who by choice or by inability refuse to accept those changes to understand them. It's been described to be as very poignant and very powerful, so I'll be able to -- I'll send an e-mail out. In fact, if we have copies, I'd be happy to have copies made and send them to all of the members.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

I'd like to see it if you could do that. Thank you.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

I would also like to extend an invitation for you to join us on September 21. We'll be holding the second annual Joseph Dwyer Peer Support Program fishing trip. It may sound like half a day out on a boat, putting a line in the water, getting some sun, but it's actually a very powerful program. Last year, we had -- it was very cathartic for a lot of the folks who took part in the trip. Many of them didn't fish. They spent the entire day just being in a different setting, completely relaxed environment. We had some spontaneous groups break out on the fishing trip, on the boat itself, and it was a very interesting thing to experience. We hadn't expected that, and I think it just goes to further the argument that getting outside the traditional box and how folks access services and how we deliver them is very important. So 8:30 a.m. I don't have the name of the boat, but I will share that. We have seating on the boat for 60, and we're looking forward to another full boat this year.

We have been talking for quite some time about the veterans housing program in Amityville. I'm happy to announce that beginning this morning, I'm told they are beginning to occupy those residences. There were some fire code issues and some building permit matters that had to be resolved before the final C of Os were issued. The C of Os were issued last Wednesday, and occupancy is taking place, I believe, starting this morning, so we've got 60 families -- 60 units being occupied by individual veterans, 12 being occupied by veterans with families. I can tell you that I've toured the property personally. I've visited the units. The apartments are actually very beautiful: high-end fixtures, wood floors, a very, very nice community setting, sort of a closed horseshoe shape that the development was constructed in, a very beautiful parklike setting inside of that horseshoe, and we're very excited about that. We have been invited to take advantage of space in the administration building to conduct services necessary as needed as well as having been given space to conduct Joseph Dwyer meetings on site on the property as well. I will be out there

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later today hopefully watching and helping some folks move into their new units, and this is very exciting. This is a very significant event for veterans, certainly veterans in need and veterans requiring housing in Suffolk County and on Long Island. This is a big deal.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Okay. Good. Anybody else for the director? Director Ronayne, as always, thank you. Thank you for being with us today.

Okay. We're going to introduce our guest today who is with us. Roger Leathers. Roger is with Services for the Underserved, supportive services for veterans families. He is the outreach coordinator and V.A. liaison. Roger, welcome. Maybe you could begin by talking a little bit about yourself, maybe some of your experiences, and I'm sure that my colleagues will be very interested to know what your background is and the very important information you're going to be sharing with us today.

**MR. LEATHERS:**

Absolutely. Thank you, Legislator, and I'd like to thank the chairman and the members for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Roger Leathers. I am a disabled combat veteran, and I'm also a licensed LMSW, licensed master social worker. I am -- what we do with the SSVF is to help veterans that are in need of housing or at risk of becoming homeless with permanent housing. I came back in 2006 with a medical discharge. I've have had five surgeries in the military, two out, for my time in service, and a lot of the things that -- I don't need this. I think I can do a little bit better without the microphone.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

I think -- there's a transcriber.

**MR. LEATHERS:**

Oh. All right. So when I got back out in 2006, I had a lot more difficulty transitioning because you just lost your career. You lost what you were doing, and with the disabilities when you're coming back, you lose a little bit about yourself; and I was blessed, we were able to find work, but I ignored the reasons why I got out of the military. I ignored that I had disabilities and started ignoring the nightmares and my changed my behavior, and the first person to really notice and try to push me to get help was my wife and my family. It did take some stubborn years, but finally reaching out to the V.A. and reaching out to agencies, I started my own path of recovery and getting my life back on track.

So what we do SUS and the SSVF program, as I mentioned, is to help those families that are becoming homeless or are homeless get permanent housing. And it's not just about throwing money at the issue. We have the funds. It's a V.A. funded program. It's also about trying to find the root cause of why these people are in the position they are and how I can assist them to be sustainable. So with the support of Service Federal Family, a little background on the grant itself. It's a V.A. funded grant. This is going to be, in October, the fourth year that the grant has been available, but this was the first full year it was available for Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Also there are four SSVF programs on the Island, three which are able to service Suffolk County: SUS in partnership with United Veterans Beacon House; there's also another grant from EOC; and a third grant from Black Vets For Social Justice, which is out of Queens.

So this program was designed to be kind of the safety net for a lot of the other V.A. programs. V.A. has some fantastic housing programs, such as the HUD-VASH grant per diem, but they noticed that they were missing some elements. So with this program, we kind of get a lot of the pieces that HUD-VASH doesn't assist for or grant per diem doesn't assist for.

We have expanded eligibility. So the V.A. usually you have to have two years active duty. You have to have an honorable discharge. With us, as long as it's not a dishonorable discharge, we can

assist, and it can be one day of active duty, so for those that have been in the national guard or those that have been in the reserves, we're able to assist.

So some of the definitions. A "veteran" is a person who served in active military, navy, or air service and was discharged or released from under conditions other than dishonorable. A veteran family can be one single person, and another plus with the veteran families, the veteran determines their family, so it doesn't to be a marriage certificate or dependent. They have veteran families there with two cousins that wanted to live together with their children. They had a father and son that were both adults, both veterans that wanted to live together. So it's not about who is dependent; it's about what the veteran wants.

And there is an income limit. Fifty percent of the area income, AMI, area median income, and on the handouts that we had, at the bottom of that newsletter is our AMI. I think it's on the next slide. So for a single person in Suffolk County, they have to make no more than \$36,800. Now, if you come across veterans that you think are just over, there are some times we can work with them if there's spend downs or things like that. But I also think this is a piece of note that our income AMI limits are higher than the City's because of our cost of living out here. And I tell you, we've been able to assist a lot of veterans because many other programs have a lot less income than this, so we're able to catch those that wouldn't normally be eligible for benefits.

Services provided, SSVF. It's a large variety. We pride ourselves on our resources, on our relationships in the community, so access to healthcare services, veteran-peer support programs, childcare, transportation costs and assistance, personal financial planning, income support services, fiduciary and payee. So some people are trying out to find out what the root cause of why these veterans need assistance. This is why we do these services. So say if it's resume building. Maybe they have a great resume but they don't have to sell themselves. We have a benefit specialist that shows them -- employment benefit specialist that works with them, shows them how to sell themselves, works on their interviewing skills.

Other services, rent and utility arrears. Many people are wondering here, What are the money services? These are the money services. Rent and utility arrears, security and first month's rent. Many of our veterans can have enough income to sustain themselves afterwards, but they can't get that starting up costs or they lost their job. They got behind in rent for a couple of months and then you got assistance to pay it off. They got a new job, but they can't keep it up, so that's where we can step in and pay off those costs. Realtor fees, moving expenses, broker's fees, housing counseling, referrals for moving services and rapid re-housing services.

In addition, the grantees may also provide time limited payments to third parties, land roads, utility companies, moving companies, licensed care providers. One of the things also is that all the money goes not to the veteran, but it goes directly to the services that are paid for so that way they can secure that these debts are being paid off. Some of the out-of-the-box thinking that this grant provides is the licensed care providers who are the day cares. So if somebody that you're servicing needs day care for their children while they are looking at a new house, while they're looking for employment, as long as they're in a program, we can assist with that limited day care time. Our program is supposed to be about 90 days. It can be extended, so any time that may be, say we're working with that veteran and they need assistance, we can provide for child care, one time moving costs. Also even to -- something as a car repair. So a veteran has an issue a few months where a few months behind in rent. All of a sudden, their car breaks down, they can't get to work, they can pay up to \$1,000 for a car repair. TFA, temporary financial assistance, the rental assistance that I talked about, eligible for payments currently due in arrears maximum eight months in a three-year period, a maximum of five months in a 12-month period.

Now, our grant stance again in October 1, there are some changes, so this actually may be expanding. I can't speak to as many months, but it's actually going to be better than this from what I've been told. Penalties or fees must be reasonable and must be directly allow participant to

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obtain/remain in current housing. Must be in compliance with rent reasonableness. We're not going to put somebody into an apartment that is unsafe.

I've already talked about the child care services, transportation services, and the car repairs. We service our grants, both Suffolk and Nassau. SSVF services all veterans from all eras. We have veterans from World War II up to the current wars. SSVF is not a HUD-VASH program, but we can definitely HUD-VASH. We work with anybody and everybody. (Indiscernible) what I said about our relationships with other programs. We're not in competition. We're here to help a veteran.

Some of the staff support that we have. We have an intake team, a housing specialist. A housing specialist is great because, even myself, trying to find an apartment, it's been difficult. So we have somebody who works with realtors that does the legwork for these veterans and then shows them the apartments. Benefits education specialist. Each veteran gets a service coordinator, a case manager. And we have veteran peer navigators. We have lengthy experiences that these people are going through, so we can walk with them. They help the veteran's adjustments. That's all it does. Any questions?

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Thank you, Roger, for joining us. Let me ask you a couple questions. How does a veteran who has been recently discharged become aware of your program? Does it get any info sheet, information, when they're leaving service that these programs are available?

**MR. LEATHERS:**

Not when they're leaving service directly because this is not a V.A. it's a V.A.-funded program given the non-profits. It's -- hopefully we try to grasp them when they get back --

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Just back a little bit from the mike.

**MR. LEATHERS:**

When they get back from the service is when with try to capture them. As the outreach coordinator, I've learned that it's not just about finding veterans at the V.A. or with Tom's office. It's about going out to the public, so we do a lot of outreach in the community, so we go to libraries, fairs, trying to get exposure up. I mean, that was one of the problems when I got back from Iraq, because there's some great programs out there, but how do we reach them out? You know, how do we reach out to them? So it's all about the exposure, absolutely.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Yeah, because I can see someone who has to utilize the V.A. system becoming aware of the programs, but for someone who just is discharged back in the community, back in Babylon or West Islip, how do they become familiar with that program? You're saying you have outreach coordinators going to libraries and schools and that type of thing to make awareness.

**MR. LEATHERS:**

Yes, absolutely, we go to libraries, we make connections with schools, we go to anywhere the public is.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Is this just a Suffolk program, or is it Nassau and Suffolk, or is it statewide?

**MR. LEATHERS:**

We're Nassau and Suffolk. Each area has our own grantees. And I think that, from what I've been told, every county in New York does have an SSVF program.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

For a wounded veteran, often they receive some sort of disability payments from the government. Is that included in that \$36,000?

**MR. LEATHERS:**

It is, but we have helped several that are 100 percent and with social security disability.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Any feasibility from a congressional perspective or a V.A. whether as the program nationally they might exclude that figure?

**MR. LEATHERS:**

Unfortunately, I haven't heard anything about that, but I think that's more the unlikely case, but some of the other incomes that are state assembly is on medicaid and they have a have a spend down. Any kind of federal (indiscernible) that would be recognized for any kind of federal exclusions, we would.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

My final question: How many veterans has your group helped so far?

**MR. LEATHERS:**

We have helped over 330 veteran families, and if you count the individuals, it's over 600.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

So there's a timeframe associated; most services will be three to four months until they get back on their feet.

**MR. LEATHERS:**

Yes.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

All right. Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Three to four months to assist them in getting back on their feet. In terms of timing, when someone comes to you or when you're made aware of somebody who might need assistance, how long but in general -- I understand that every case is different -- but in general, how long does it take to register someone to go through the process to get them the services that they need from inception?

**MR. LEATHERS:**

I think a safe number, I'd say, about two and a half months. I mean, we have seen some great results with people within a week to two weeks from the first time we do an intake. As you said, it is case by case, though, so the average is probably about two to two and a half months.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Anybody else? Legislator Barraga.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Just to get an opinion, what branch of the service were you in?

**MR. LEATHERS:**

I was in the Army.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

The Army. I know the policy of the Marine Corps with reference to somebody who is wounded -- and that policy was changed about eight or nine years ago. Up to that time, if you were wounded, at some point, would be leave -- be excised from the Marine Corps. You'd go back into civilian life, but the policy was changed that all wounded marines, if they wanted to stay in the Marine Corps, they could do so. Does the Army have that policy?

**MR. LEATHERS:**

Not that I know of. I wasn't -- personally, I wasn't given a choice, so --

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

That's the reason I'm asking, because in some cases, I kind of feel that there were certain individuals who, once they're wounded, they're better off staying in the service at least for a length of time until they can get their bearings in terms of what they want to do in terms of what they want to do as far as of staying in the Army or staying in the Marine Corps, or actually going back into civilian life. So the Army really didn't change that policy?

**MR. LEATHERS:**

No.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

You really didn't have the proper choice.

**MR. LEATHERS:**

No, I didn't.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

All right. In retrospect, if you'd had that choice, would you have stayed in the army for a little longer?

**MR. LEATHERS:**

I would've loved to. I was, you know, I was six years in, and I was looking at putting in my officer candidate packet.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

So once you were wounded, you said you had five operations, so the Army kind of moved to put you back into civilian life?

**MR. LEATHERS:**

Yes.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

All right. Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

All right. Director.

**DIRECTOR RONAYNE:**

To Legislator Barraga's question about the service-connected compensation being considered as a factor in the income, the \$36,800 threshold falls at just about where the 100 percent service-connected veteran would land if that were his sole source of income; that would be the income for his annual intake.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Let's go with that example. So if that veteran had some other savings, interest on savings accounts, or somebody gave him some stocks or something, that would take him right over the

threshold.

**MR. LEATHERS:**

Technically, yes. What I would say is this is an outstanding example of where professional advocacy is really invaluable. One of the things that most of the applicants are not aware of until they've been able to meet with a professional, ideally somebody from my office or certainly Roger is very well-versed in this. We, for example, have tremendous success in identifying allowable spend downs: any out-of-pocket medical expenses, devices, home adaptations. There are a great many qualifying spend downs that folks are just not aware of, and in many cases, they will bring folks significantly below that threshold were they only aware of them.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Okay. Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

All right. Well, Roger, thank you for being with us today. The information that should have been distributed to all of my colleagues is very important to any of us and our staffs that serve our veterans and our communities. You know, we're constantly asking ourselves and asking the professionals that we work with how can we be of assistance. Well, this is exactly the kind of program, Roger, where you and the staff that you work with, the Directors, of course, is providing a hands-on, front-line assistance to our veterans and their families, and this is important information for all of us to have, so thank you for sharing it with us today.

**MR. LEATHERS:**

And thank you.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Okay. We have one introductory resolution before us today.

It is **IR 1716, Designating "POW/MIA Recognition Day" in Suffolk County (Stern)**. This is the third Friday in September, which is based on the federal day of recognition, so this would put Suffolk County in line with the federal day of recognition for POW/MIA recognition day. I'm going to make a motion to approve. Second by Legislator Barraga. All in favor? Any opposed? Any abstentions? IR 1716 is **approved. (VOTE: 4-0-0-1, Not Present: Krupski)** Okay.

There being no other business before the committee --

**MR. MCABEE:**

(Raises hand).

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Yes, sir?

**MR. MCABEE:**

I signed up for the public portion.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Thank you. I was not aware this was a card that was handed up to me. So, please, my apologies. Thomas McAbee. Please take the podium. You have three minutes as part of our public portion. But thank you for pointing that out.

**MR. MCABEE:**

Thank you. Good morning. My name is a Thomas McAbee. I'm executive director of the Lloyd Magothy Water Trust, which has a dual mission. The mission is environmental and societal, and both of those missions are concerned with keeping medications properly disposed. One, keep

medications out of our water supply, and also out of the hands of those individuals who might seek to divert those medications for nonmedical purposes.

Now, both of those missions concern the medicine cabinet. A couple of weeks ago, I spoke with Detective Lieutenant Robert Donohue of the Suffolk County Police Department, who is in charge of Operation Medicine Cabinet for the Suffolk County Police. And, as you know, a couple of months ago, the county executive, Steve Bellone, the administration expanded Operation Medicine Cabinet to the senior centers. So I contacted Detective Lieutenant Donohue, and I made this proposal. I said if the Lloyd Magothy Water Trust could donate free of charge to Suffolk County six big red boxes, which are pharmaceutical collection receptacles, could they be installed in the senior centers, and would the Suffolk County Police continue to take custody of and dispose of those medications. The response I got from Detective Lieutenant Donohue was positive, but in the last conversation I had with him last week, he said we would need to get the director of aging services -- I think I have that right -- Office for the Aging to buy into the program.

So my request is this: If the committee feels that this is a worthwhile initiative, perhaps a member of this committee, myself, Detective Lieutenant Donohue, and the director of the Office of the Aging could meet and discuss this program. I have met one on one with Legislator Stern, Anker, and Krupski. I have not met with the other members of the committee here, but I would like to provide a handout to the clerk here.

**MS. GELLERSTEIN:**

Do you have copies?

**MR. MCABEE:**

No, I don't.

**MS. GELLERSTEIN:**

I'll make copies.

**MR. MCABEE:**

Okay. And I just wanted to mention that the box, the big red boxes are manufactured in Ronkonkoma, and the last box that I installed was in the East Hampton Senior Center, and it was sponsored by the East Hampton Rotary, so I was hoping if Legislator Muratore could take this with him when he leaves and perhaps discuss it with his rotary group the next time he meets.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Legislator Barraga.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

You and I have not met, but let me ask you a question. Can you tell me a little bit about these? Is this a lock box?

**MR. MCABEE:**

Yes. It is a metal container. It's 50 inches tall and approximately 18 by 18, the footprint. It has two locks, and it is bolted to the floor so it is secure, and when it's not in use, it can be locked up fully.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Once you put the medication in, it's impossible to get the medication out?

**MR. MCABEE:**

Only with a key.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Only with a key?

**MR. MCABEE:**

Correct.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

All right. And you want to put these where; in the senior citizens' centers?

**MR. MCABEE:**

I'd like to put one in each senior center where the Suffolk County Police already picks up the medication and, you know, I would really --

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

How do they go about picking up the medication now?

**MR. MCABEE:**

Well, it's interesting. The way I understand it is that a Suffolk County police officer is pulled off of patrol and spends three hours in a senior center. At six senior centers, that would be 18 officer hours per month but --

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

To do what; wait for people to come in and give them the medications?

**MR. MCABEE:**

Correct. They just wait there. That's my understanding. So with this method of having a box in the facility, medications could be disposed of and then an officer could just make a round and pick it up. It would be more efficient.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

In your experience, do many seniors often have medication to drop into a box and give to a police officer.

**MR. MCABEE:**

Yes. In fact, you know, the Suffolk County Police started the Operation Medicine Cabinet in 2010, and Detective Lieutenant Donohue said that in that period of time, they have collected more than 17,000 pounds of medication, and, of course, seniors use more medication than other populations.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

I take it, I guess they, in some cases, the medications are not finished or completed and not on -- it's not a daily regimen. It might an antibiotic or something that they take for X amount of days and then they have left over medication.

**MR. MCABEE:**

Yes, correct. There's a lot of different scenarios where medications become unwanted.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

So it's your understanding that a police officer spends three hours periodically in a senior citizens center waiting for seniors to give that officer medication that they no longer need or use.

**MR. MCABEE:**

Yes. I think the program right now -- I would have to clarify it with Detective Lieutenant Donohue because it just started I think about a month ago -- in that an officer would be stationed at a senior center for three hours at that senior center for one time a month; and then, perhaps, next week go to another senior center and spend --

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Because there are many senior centers.

**MR. MCABEE:**

Yeah. So it's an inefficient program. I think having a box there would make it more efficient.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Well, certainly, as you've explained it, if it's true, it's certainly inefficient. Okay. Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

To Legislator Barraga and to my colleagues, the current way of having structure when you have personnel come out to the senior centers as opposed to having a fixed box that can be the receptacle might be deemed inefficient is also being done in accordance with what is right now required in DEA regulations. There are draft regulations, and perhaps that is something that can be changed in the future. That's what many of us are working towards. But as of right now, the question is one of being able to dispose of particularly controlled substances under the supervision of law enforcement, which is what federal requirements require right now. And so the idea is, yeah, we have fixed receptacles in all of our precincts, which works well. It's a fixed location that many of our residents are aware of. It works because it's right there in the lobby of a precinct, which qualifies as being under the supervision of law enforcement for purposes of federal regulations. The hope that the kind of receptacle that that speaker is referring to is exactly the kind of receptacle that is being considered now under what hopefully becomes an active regulation. That is the hope to make it more efficient in the future and be able to comply with federal regulations at the same time. That's what we're planning for.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

I guess the point I'm making is that if it's true that a police officer spends three hours at a senior citizens' center waiting for seniors to turn over the medication, that's the part that I think is inefficient. I mean, the solution may well be what you're suggesting.

**MR. MCABEE:**

Yes, and I would like to offer this: The program that I suggested for the East Hampton Town senior center is that the center designate one day per week as drug disposal day. Say it's going to be Wednesday, so the box is available, it's open, unlocked, available to senior centers on that particular day. At the end of the day, an officer comes to the senior center and cleans out the box, taking all medication with him; so perhaps something like that would work.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Legislator Muratore.

**LEG. MURATORE:**

Thank you. My question is security of the box. Being in a precinct, there's people at the desk watching the box. Now you put this in a senior center and it's closed up, and it's a Tuesday night. You know, people are looking to get drugs any way they can. What about a burglary occurring in the senior center? Is thing secure? I mean, they rip out ATM machines. If they want the drugs, they know they're there, they're going to break into the center and steal the drugs.

**MR. MCABEE:**

Yes, that's always a concern, and that's why I would suggest that one day per week the box be available and also the program be promoted only to senior citizens who utilize the senior center, not to the general public; and at the end of a particular day that an officer would come and clean out the box so there would be nothing left in the box until the next event.

**LEG. MURATORE:**

Like I said, my only concern is security of the box. If they know they're there, they're going to find

out. I mean, Grandma is going to tell the grandson and the grandson is going to tell his friends and eventually -- I guess coming out of law enforcement, I look at things a different way, and I see a problem occurring with the security no matter how secure: to the floor, to the wall, in a locked cabinet; maybe a safe might be a different story. But in the precincts, it's fine. You know, this body supported that resolution back in 2010 when I introduced it to put the boxes in the precincts to collect the medication. So I think really that's that safest place for collecting medication rather than -- I mean, the box is a great idea, but I don't know about the security unless it's 24 hours under the office of the police department.

**MR. MCABEE:**

I appreciate your concern. I would just like to add this, that throughout the country, throughout the United States, there are many senior centers that are hosting these boxes. Also these boxes are at fire departments, and I visited Madison County, New York, which is just east of Syracuse, New York, they have one in the Department of Motor Vehicles. It is a concern, yes, but I think it's mitigated by the fact that box is lockable and it's bolted to the floor.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Legislator Anker.

**LEG. ANKER:**

Yeah, and I did meet with you and it's fascinating. You actually brought the box in. It's a big box. It's this red -- how big is it? What's the dimensions?

**MR. MCABEE:**

It's about almost not quite as big as this lectern, but it's a little bit narrower.

**LEG. ANKER:**

About three feet or so.

**MR. MCABEE:**

Four feet high.

**LEG. ANKER:**

Four feet high, yeah, it's a big box. And I understand, yes, there is a concern that, you know, if word got out that there's medication at a senior center, There could be a safety concern in this. Legislator Muratore mentioned why we have them at precincts, and, again, it's something I would like to continue to pursue to try to get the unwanted pharmaceutical products, you know, away from the hands of the kids that are getting all of this stuff.

But now, you also looked into the pharmacies. What is the latest information that you have? Like CVS and Walgreens, why won't they put these boxes -- the drugs are already in that building. They're already there. Why wouldn't the pharmacies not participate, or are they participating in this project?

**MR. MCABEE:**

There are a few retail pharmacies that are participating. The large pharmacies, such as Walgreens, Rite Aid, CVS are not particularly because there's a very large cost to hosting a box. First of all, you have to purchase the thing, you have to be responsible for the disposal, so they haven't jumped in on it just yet. But I actually have one box in a retail pharmacy, and the medications are disposed of by the village police department, so there is law enforcement involved in each box I have located.

**LEG. ANKER:**

And I think when we were discussing this, you said the drugs needed to be a non-narcotic drug? Or what's the status of the drug that people can drop off?

**MR. MCABEE:**

There are two categories; one is controlled and the other is non-controlled, and in a police station, both controlled and non-controlled drugs can be collected. In a retail pharmacy at this point or in a senior center, there would have to be signage on the box that says "non-controlled only." But because it's reasonable to assume that most people do not know the difference between controlled and non-controlled, you're going to deposit some controlled into it. Keep in mind that controlled substances represent about 12 percent of medications out there, so that's why I'm being a little extra cautious and prudent and trying to involve law enforcement in the custody and disposal.

**LEG. ANKER:**

Well, we certainly appreciate all your time and effort and what you're doing, and it was a pleasure meeting with you in my office and seeing you here today. I also want to put this idea out there and maybe something that the legislators can follow up. You know, you mentioned that the CVS, Walgreens, Wal-Mart, you know, they're not participating at this point because I guess there's an expense, but, you know, there's an ultimate expense that we're dealing with, and, of course, it's contamination of water, which is your high concern and my high concern is that our children are getting all of these things, these drugs. But have you looked into the pharmaceutical companies themselves to see if they sponsor these boxes?

**MR. MCABEE:**

I just began that effort. Pharmaceutical manufacturers, and there's 12 of them here in Suffolk County, I hope that they would, you know, help support this initiative. These boxes do cost. They're about almost \$1,500 apiece; that's delivered and installed. So right now I have been going to civic organizations, such as Rotary, to help fund the work that I'm doing.

**LEG. ANKER:**

Well, again, I look forward to maybe, you know, help draft a letter to these pharmaceutical companies, the multibillion dollar companies, because there's an ultimate responsibility of everyone involved in creating a safe environment. And, again, thank you so much for the effort you've put forth.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Again, certainly you would expect the pharmaceutical companies or the large-chain drugstores, even civic associations to participate in this effort of, you know, keeping these types of substances out of the hands particularly of our young people and help them protect our environment, and, sure, there is a cost element to it. My understanding in having conversations over several years is really the law enforcement requirement and specifically the controlled versus non-controlled substances and how do you divide that out, and who takes on the responsibility for that; and that's why the help at the federal level when they're considering a revision in the DEA regulations is going to answer a lot of those questions and give all of us a path on how best to proceed.

Thank you. Thank you for being with us today, appreciate it. Anything else? Legislator Muratore.

**LEG. MURATORE:**

Just on the topic of seniors, I don't see anyone here from Office of the Aging. Is there anyone here from Office of the Aging? Just for the record, I want to put -- you know, I'm a little disappointed that the county executive cancelled the senior picnic and scheduled a concert, and the concert is on the day of the general meeting, so I can't go now, so I'm just letting the county executive know.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Mr. Vaughn.

**MR. VAUGHN:**

Well, I'm very sorry, Legislator Muratore, regarding your disappointment on this. I would just say for years, the Department of Again has been seeing less and less interest in the picnic and there has

been concerns in recent years about the picnic and heat. I know that heat was not really an issue for much of this summer, although today I feel like I could swim back to the office. But that is the reason why he -- why there was a decision to try a different event, whereas we had been having to throw out some food in previous years because of the lack of attendance, and I think that the concert has seen a really pretty dramatic spike in terms of interest. There was a notice sent out regarding it, and I believe -- I'm actually happy to report that that concert sold out within a day, and when I say "sold out," I mean the free tickets were distributed within a day, so I think that that's positive, and I think we had so much interest in it, as a matter of fact, I think we're looking into the possibilities of seeing if there might be a way to do a second or follow-up event for that. We do apologize for the disappointment, but we are certainly excited about the new event that's in its place.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Legislator Muratore.

**LEG. MURATORE:**

It's not so much changing it from a picnic to a concert. It's just the day you picked. You picked our general meeting.

My other concern is no one -- none of my seniors contacted me asking about the concert or even thanking us, which they usually do. Do we have a list OF where the tickets went per district? How was it done?

**MR. VAUGHN:**

I know that the senior centers were reached out to directly, so each of the towns' senior centers were reached out to directly, and I know that there was a mailing that also was sent out, and I will follow up on the mailing information for you.

**LEG. MURATORE:**

Okay, Tom. Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

Thank you, Tom. Anybody else? The date of the event?

**MR. VAUGHN:**

The date of the event is actually September 12th. I don't believe it's on the date of the general meeting. I thought that was the 9th.

**LEG. MURATORE:**

I thought it was. I stand corrected.

**CHAIRMAN STERN:**

All right. Good on the date. There being no other business before the committee, we are adjourned. Thank you.

*(\*The meeting was adjourned at 11:54 a.m. \*)*