

HEALTH COMMITTEE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
VETERANS & SENIORS COMMITTEE

of the

Suffolk County Legislature

2016 Joint Operating Budget Meeting

Minutes

A Special Joint meeting of the Health Committee, Human Services Committee and the Veterans & Seniors Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York, on Tuesday, October 20, 2015 at 1:30 P.M. to discuss the matter of the 2016 Operating Budget.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Legislator William Spencer - Chairman/Health

Legislator Kate Browning - Vice-Chair/Health & Vice-Chair/Human Services

Legislator Robert Calarco - Member/Health

Legislator Robert Trotta - Member/Health & Member/Human Services

Legislator Monica Martinez - Chairperson/Human Services & Member/Health

Legislator Lou D'Amaro - Member/Human Services

Legislator Kevin McCaffrey - Member/Human Services

Legislator Steven Stern - Chairman/Veterans & Seniors

Legislator Tom Barraga - Vice-Chair/Veterans & Seniors

Legislator Sarah Anker - Member/Veterans & Seniors

Legislator Al Krupski - Member/Veterans & Seniors

Legislator Tom Muratore - Member/Veterans & Seniors

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Jason Richberg, Clerk of the Legislature

John O'Neill, Commissioner, Department of Social Services

Linda Mermelstein, Chief Deputy Commissioner, Health Services

Christina Capobianco - Deputy Commissioner, Health Services

Jennifer Culp, Assistant to the Commissioner/Department of Health Services

Gerry Vazquez, Director of Programs/LI Network of Community Services

Karen Borstein, President and CO of Family Service League

Jonelle Redmond, Family Service League.

Karen Lombri, The Retreat

Danielle Donahue, Program Manager, March of Dimes

Susan Tamborello-Toman, The Guidance Center

Janene Gentile, North Shore Youth Council

Kathleen Malloy, AME

All Other Interested Parties

Minutes Taken By:

Gabrielle Severs - Court Stenographer

Minutes Transcribed By:

Denise Weaver - Legislative Aide

(The meeting was called to order at 1:38 p.m.)

VETERANS & SENIORS OPERATING BUDGET HEARING

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the budget public hearings on the Veterans and Seniors Committee and the Health and Human Services Committees. I'm going to ask everybody to please rise and join us in the Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator Browning.

(*Salutation*)

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

(*Moment of Silence Observed*)

Okay. We'll start off with Veterans and Seniors and then we'll hand it off to Legislator Martinez for the Health portion of today's Human Services Committee.

I don't see that I have any cards from anyone with us today who would like to comment on the Veterans and Seniors portion of the program. Is there anybody that would like to address the Committee from the public? Seeing none, the Veterans and Seniors portion of the program is -- that portion will stand in recess, and I will turn it over to Legislator Martinez for Human Services.

HUMAN SERVICES OPERATING BUDGET HEARING

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Thank you and good afternoon. We do have a few cards for the Human Services Budget hearing. First, we have Gerry Vazquez. Gerry Vazquez, if you can please come forward. You will have three minutes, Mr. Vazquez.

MR. VAZQUEZ:

Hi, I'm Gerry Vazquez. I'm Director of Programs for the Long Island Network of Community Services, a non-profit agency in Hauppauge -- with offices in Hauppauge and Greenport with a commitment to enhancing the health and safety of young people across Suffolk County by bringing together local leaders and institutions, developing innovative strategies, piloting programs and scaling up proven interventions.

We're currently focused on two initiatives: Reducing youth substance abuse in the North Fork and reducing youth violence in the Patchogue/Medford communities. Both of these efforts involve an assessment of needs, collaboration among youth serving institutions and community members and the implementation of research based proven practices tailored to local needs and multi-year engagements with local capacity building for sustainability.

I'm here in support of county funding for the underserved North Fork, and in particular, our project, the North Fork Alliance. The North Fork Alliance brings together people from across the North Fork to identify youth needs and deploy strategies to stem alcohol and drug use among minors. Our strategies include educating young people and parents about the dangers of alcohol and drugs, supporting youth leadership development in schools and in the community, conducting positive alternative activities and events and collaborating with police and retailers to reduce youth access to alcohol and drugs.

Our survey data shows that we're making a significant change in youth attitudes and behaviors in regards to the drugs and alcohol. The Bach Harrison Prevention Needs Assessment Survey of 2012 and 2015, which we administered and was completed by middle and high school students from all three area school districts, found an 8% drop in alcohol use, an 11 1/2% drop in binge drinking, a 52% drop in cigarette smoking, and a 22% drop in marijuana use. More dramatically among 8th graders that the survey found a 50% drop in alcohol use, 70% drop in marijuana use and a 67% drop in cigarette smoking. This is real and welcomed progress but much work is still needed. Unfortunately, alcohol is still way -- alcohol use is still above the national average on the North Fork as it is across all of Long Island. And 43% of students self-identified as being at high risk for alcohol and drug use.

I'm asking for your support in funding the North Fork Alliance, a project that's getting results and whose successful strategies may be of interest to other communities with similar challenges. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Thank you, Mr. Vazquez.

Okay, next we have Ms. Karen Borstein from Family Service League.

MS. BORSTEIN:

Thank you. My name is Karen Borstein, I'm the President and CO of Family Service League and I'm here to ask your support to restore the funding for the programs which have been cut in the Suffolk County Executive's proposed budget for 2016.

A vast majority of our programs serve all 18 Legislative districts and have not had increases in years and still we've continued to find ways to get it done. Our offices offer direct links to each of your offices where your constituents are reaching out for help and the staff contacts us as they should. Enduring cuts will certainly impact our services to our shared constituency. I've e-mailed each of you with a breakdown of the cuts and our request for how much needs to be restored to keep it at the 2015 level. As an example of some of the cuts, our suicide prevention program, affectionately known as Joe's Project, has been eliminated with \$35,000, a small price to pay to enable us to have staff to go out on an almost immediate basis when a family has suffered the loss of someone who's taken their life. The grief is unimaginable and this year we assisted 97 people for 26 completed suicides, one of which was a 13 year-old girl.

Over 24,000 was removed from our Bay Shore Family Center, which predominantly serves thousands of people each year, the vast majority coming from Brentwood, Bay Shore and Central Islip. People come to us in direct -- for direct services in dire need of everything to helping them find housing, employment, mental health treatment and treatment for addictions. Our family centers an integrated setting where consumers can get all of their needs met under one roof, we're efficient and cost effective.

I urge you to keep us whole and to find the offsets to restore these programs to its -- their current level. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Thank you. Any questions? Okay, next we go to Ms. Jonelle Redmond also from Family Service League.

MS. REDMOND:

Good afternoon. My name is Jonelle Redmond, I'm a single working mother of three. I currently reside in Huntington with my three young children. Previously I lived in Nassau County and during

this time I was accepted to the CDC Section 8 Program where I was made to move to Huntington with my son, who at the time, was only three years-old.

I struggled during this period in my life. I was limited to transportation and didn't have access to a car. I depended on unemployment as my only source of income. I was only able to provide for my son's basic needs. I felt upset and could not provide -- that I could not provide more.

In addition to my struggles, I did not want to have any sorts or parts of Huntington, I felt distant from the community and was reluctant to become involved. Eventually I started to date again, I was pregnant and became tangled in an abusive relationship. My life was filled with stress once again. My unemployment ran out and my heat was turned off. I needed help. I broke down and went to the Department of Social Services for assistance. DSS accepted my TA application and provided the support I was in need of. I was informed that when my youngest child turned three months I would be placed in the SWEP Program, the Suffolk Works Employment Program. This program provided me with assistance towards employment and eventually a career goal. I was given the opportunity through SWEP to work off my grant from DSS at Family Service League in Huntington at the Manor Field Family Center. Working at Manor Field Family Center every day I became more aware of Huntington's community and many of its residents, this constant support, education resources and services provided by Family Service League. Family Service League holds great importance to the population served. After six months of working at Manor Field Family Center I was offered a part-time position there. Although it was hourly part-time position with no benefits I decided to take the job because I felt great to be working and providing for my family. There was a point when I started to emotionally give up on myself, however, the staff at Family Service League believed in me and more importantly helped me believe in myself. During the time I was working the abuse at home was getting worse. I was only being mistreated -- I wasn't only being mistreated by my youngest child's father but also his mother. I decided to seek help from both my program director and my division director at Family Service League, they gave me the support I was needed. I was given community and agency resources in order to move into an environment away from the abuse into a beautiful home. Working at Manor Field, I came across many other families in similar situations and struggling to provide for their families. There was a child that was attending our Homework Help Program, was really having a hard time with his work, we found out the child was having problems seeing the board at school. Our community advocate helped the child get glasses. Not only has the child improved in school and in our program but this child had been accepted to the SUNY Farmingdale Science Academy Summer Program. The child excelled in the program and built a robot.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Ms. Redmond, I'm sorry, your time has expired, if you can wrap up please.

MS. REDMOND:

Okay. Today I stand here as a proud product of how Family Service League has, have and can restore and rebuild lives. They gave me hope and courage and I'm thankful for my children are growing up at Family Service League kids.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Thank you. Next we have Ms. Karen Lombri. Ms. Lombri, I must say you have nice handwriting.

MS. LOMBRI:

Good afternoon, my name is Karen Lombri and I'm a Program Director at the Retreat; eastern Long Island's only dedicated domestic violence services agency whose mission is to provide, safety, shelter and support for victims of domestic abuse and to break the cycle of family violence. For those of you who are not familiar with the Retreat, our core services include a 24-hour bilingual hotline, emergency shelter, counseling, legal advocacy and prevention education.

For the last 28 years the Retreat has been a safe haven for thousands of residents from all areas of Suffolk County. Our shelter is tucked away in a remote part of Suffolk County, a long distance away from any abusers and provides battered women and their children the opportunity to safely heal, access support and realize, reestablish their lives free from silence.

The Suffolk County Legislature has been pivotal in providing support both financially and energetically at the community level for our lifesaving work with victims of domestic violence. Just two weeks ago on October 2nd -- 7th, we collectively honored both the Suffolk County residents who we have lost and survivors of domestic violence. We celebrated the legislation that has been enacted to support victims and survivors and the availability of services for survivors. As domestic violence is a public safety issue, the work that we have done together has saved or enhanced the physical and emotional wellbeing of countless residents of Suffolk County and has helped us to work to prevent future abuse and to improve the health and safety and quality of life in our region.

Unfortunately, the progress that we have made together is in jeopardy as the County Executive proposed to cut funding for the Retreat by \$49,820 in the 2016 budget. The proposed cuts will undermine the advances that we've made together. Prior to the budget being released, the Retreat's Executive Director, Loretta Davis, sent a letter to the County and to the Legislators requesting a larger funding allocation from the County's budget in 2016 in order to directly address elevated need and unprecedented victim waiting lists. Over the last five years the Retreat has experienced a 75% an increase for request for services to our 24-hour hotline. In August of 2015 we received a record number of hotline calls.

In response to the increased request for services the Retreat has been force to implement for the first time ever a wait list for our legal advocacy program, set time limits for counseling services and turned down community and school requests for education about domestic violence, dating violence.

I'm here to ask you to reinstate the money that has been cut from the Retreat. At a time when heightened national media attention to abuse -- is giving abuse, I'm sorry, at a time when heightened national media attention to abuse is giving more of our local residents the courage to ask for help, we don't want anyone -- we don't want to not be able to help anybody. We want to be able to meet every request that comes through our doors. We don't want to put people in on a wait-list.

Please help us meet the increased need for our critical services and ensure that victims of domestic violence who have had the courage to finally reach out for assistance do not receive immediate -- do receive immediate and comprehensive crisis intervention services. This goal is within our collective reach. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Thank you.

Next up we have Ms. Danielle Donahue from March of Dimes.

MS. DONAHUE:

Good afternoon everybody, my name is Danielle Donahue, I'm a Program Manager for the March of Dimes NICU Family Support Program at Stony Brook Hospital. The program has been a part of Stony Brook Hospital for the last ten years and we are proud to be a part of the team serving families in Suffolk County. We are grateful for the support and ask for continued support for our program.

Last year the Stony Brook NICU had over 1000 admissions and our goal is to reach each of these

families with at least 800 of them receiving a family care kit, which provides invaluable materials and literature and just ways for them to cope with the NICU experience. It can be incredibly stressful to have a hospitalized child, particularly an infant, so our goal is to provide education, support as well as a sense of community so people don't feel so isolated during their experience.

We also provide education to the staff so they can better understand the experiences and collaborate with the families, families are very much a part of a child's recovery so our goal is to promote family centered care so the family is a part of the medical team.

The goal of the March of Dimes is for every baby to be born healthy. Unfortunately, that's not the case and one out of every nine children is born prematurely and many of them have a very, very lengthy NICU stay so we have provided, over the last three years, 125 classes to educate these families with the goal of increasing their confidence in being caregivers. Currently we're the only program in New York State that is serving families in this manner. The importance of this program is to support these families, get them on the right road, they've had a rough start and to help their children grow in the way that they deserve to. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Thank you. Any questions? Okay. We next move onto Ms. Susan Tamborello-Toman.

MS. TAMBORELLO-TOMAN:

Hi everyone. I'm Susan Tamborello-Toman and I'm here from the Guidance Center, a not-for-profit on the East End on the North Fork. We've been a not-for-profit since 2003. We began the process in the year 2000 when we had a group of students who chose to commit suicide and it became apparent that we needed to do something on the North Fork.

I had a foster child at the time who was in that age group and we began research and our research led us to prevention. Eventually the prevention education that we received as a community, as it was slowly growing as a little community group, this not-for-profit, we were asked by New York State Office of Alcohol Substance Abuse Services to be a representative on the East End and bring education to the East End. As a technical assistant, I brought to the five East End towns the education to build coalitions. We now have a coalition on the North Fork, it includes all 12 sectors of our community. It also includes Sheriff DeMarco and the Head Start Program so we start prevention very early on and we continue it right through to 21.

We are not a -- we don't have a storefront. We are boots on the ground type of people. We have a great board of directors that includes psychologists, social workers, gerontologists, artists, I don't want to forget anybody, alcohol and drug counselors, recreational therapists and we incorporate, we've been supported by our local Lions Club, Italian American Club. We include all areas of those sectors together to provide this prevention. No one gets a salary, everybody is a volunteer. We work very hard to establish a healthy community, safe place for our youth. We have a dance every month during school on Saturdays. The school offers a lot of opportunities and the students -- we also did the Bach Harrison, we did the first Bach Harrison survey in 2006 and we realized that the schools were doing a great job. The children did not feel connected to the community. The survey showed that there was an early onset of underage drinking and substance abuse, a lack of connection to the community and a belief that adults really didn't mind that they were doing these behaviors. So the program, the evidence based programs that everyone talks about, they are not just pick one program, they're programs that you pick to serve your needs and the needs that we saw we needed, those programs were the Lions Quest Program, the Lions were very generous to us, had us trained out in Virginia.

And I just want to say that in closing we serve a 100 kids every month at the dances. The children come to the summer wellness age eight to fourteen for free, 8:30 to 4:30 and it is all volunteers.

The money that we get from the Legislator, we are so grateful for, it is a \$5000 grant. I believe in the 15 years we've been doing prevention that we did affect those numbers that you're seeing in the Bach Harrison report. We are the boots on the ground and thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Thank you.

Next we have Ms. Janene Gentile.

MS. GENTILE:

Thank you for this opportunity. My name is Janene Gentile, I'm the Executive Director of North Shore Youth Council. Our agency's a non-for-profit agency. We're located on the northern corridor of Rocky Point, Miller Place, Shoreham-Wading River, Mount Sinai. We have a bit of Wading River Riverhead area and now Comsewogue and Port Jeff area.

After reviewing the County budget 2016 we found that our funding had been reduced. These cuts were drastic -- will reduce the services that we provide in our community. We're asking for your support, your support to restore these funds. As you know, North Shore Youth Council is the leading agency for 35 years. We are a substance abuse prevention agency. We provide intervention and core services to our youth. Our youth have a voice, a very large voice in our organization. There are 17 youth that serve on our board of directors along with an adult board of directors that represent all of our communities. We forge partnerships. We are in a relationship, as our Legislator Anker, Sarah Anker, has talked about is public to private partnerships. Our school districts are in a strong relationship with our agency. They provide the gyms, the lunchrooms and counseling offices for our agency. We have nine staff within the Rocky Point and Miller Place, Shoreham-Wading River and 65 staff in all of the schools providing before care at a quarter-to-six in the morning till six-thirty in the evening. We provide counseling with private counselors that come in at no charge to provide substance abuse counseling intervention services. We have family support groups, that is the key to preventing substance abuse in our communities. Heroin is here. It's not on the rise, it's an epidemic. It is here. I happen to be a Marine mom, my son is home from Iraq in the war, we know what they're suffering from. Those young people are young, they're not 30 years-old, they're 22 and 24 years-old. We work with the VFW's, we work the Lions Clubs, we work with the Rotary Clubs to connect into services. We've expanded our age groups from entering kindergarten through 24 years-old. We provide jobs. We're -- please, we're begging you, it's hard, I hear it from everyone, I want to share everything we have with these other agencies up here, but please, provide us with this -- the funding so we can provide the service and thank you for all your hard work. I have some packets for you guys. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Thank you. Also, Ms. Gentile, Legislator Anker has a question for you.

LEG. ANKER:

Hi Janene, thank you for coming out today, and, again, thank you for all the organizations for coming out today.

I just want to clarify, you know, there's sometimes people don't realize North Shore Youth Council is intensely involved with the drug awareness issue, you know, I know you do -- you do some daycare programs, you do some summer programs, those are absolutely beautiful, but, I tell you, it seems like there's, you know, a huge portion of your focus is on drug awareness, drug rehabilitation, drug awareness support for the parents, it's just, it's phenomenal to see how much one organization can really focus on this and then how prominent you are in my district across the North Shore. You know, people think it's just Rocky Point, it's not just Rocky Point. Now, could you mention the other areas that you also work with?

MS. GENTILE:

We picked up the gap in services over in Comsewogue. We work with much of -- even special needs, kids on the spectrum. We offer free socialization groups, actually North Shore Youth Council help with the County Exec's, Steve Bellone, PSA, this past year those were our families that were brave enough and it wasn't just a PSA it was a heartfelt information that brought other families forth. We connected them with the services, we work with the Sheriff's Department, we work with the Health Department here. Narcan training will be coming to Miller Place, Rocky Point and Shoreham/Wading River and Mount Sinai area this next week. We have a community night this next Thursday night so we're out there as we -- as my sister has said here, boots on the ground. We're going to do it anyway. We going to do this anyway, we just need your support to keep it up. We help each other. Hope House is an amazing organization, amazing. Family Service League, amazing organization, YMCA, amazing, because they don't turn anybody away.

LEG. ANKER:

Right, right. And this is why we need the support services, you know, as we go through dealing with the drug epidemic and the economic situation, you know, it just seems like everything -- you know, there needs to be more support services, but, unfortunately, because of economic issue, you know, we're having to deal with paying for that but, you know, by investing into these services we're actually, you know, not only are we saving money but we're saving lives and that's what's most important so I just want to commend you and the folks out here for coming and speaking on that and, you know, again, we will do everything we can to help preserve those funds but thank you for coming out here.

MS. GENTILE:

Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Thank you. Now we have Kathleen Malloy from AME.

MS. MALLOY:

Good afternoon. My name is Kathleen Malloy representing Suffolk County AME President Brian Macri. Thank you for allowing me to speak.

Based upon both our and your Budget Review Office review, the budget is not adequately balanced. This Capital Budget has not addressed the structural fiscal problem that has existed in the General Fund for over ten years, the absolute need to raise a recurring revenue. Sending a message to other taxing jurisdictions has only negatively impacted the County's fiscal standings and has resulted in General Fund being less than a mere 1% of total property taxes in Suffolk.

AME has born the negative impact of this policy in making a no-pay agreement for no layoffs, a hiring freeze and a deferred payroll. As Suffolk County Legislators, I am sure you recognize that our greatest asset are our County employees and AME represents the largest number of County employees. Our members have been described as the backbone of Suffolk County government, which they rightfully are. Although a quick solution might be to tap into a reserve account to offset the current imbalance, that would only make the fiscal problems more severe in 2017. We need a recurring revenue source. Since budgets tend to be incremental the only realistic short term solution would result in becoming a long term solution is to increase property taxes. The financial impact, although symbolically scary, is actually negligible per household. The average household property tax has been reported to be \$9875.00, which is, surprisingly, my property taxes, so I will use mine as an example. My portion for County taxes for the services I receive is \$94 a year. A \$50 per year increase to me alone would represent an increase to my property taxes of about 56%. My taxes would then go up to about \$144 from \$94, which is a monthly increase of \$4.17. However, think of what an across the board increase of 56% could result in coming from {five

thousand seventy four hundred eighteen} housing units in Suffolk County, which I received from the 2014 Suffolk County census facts. And keep in mind, this is the average tax bill, the result would be 28.5 million annually and that's at the increase of between 50 and 56% for the first year, 2016. If we raise taxes the second year, 2017 incrementally less at 33%, the results for me would be an average of \$48 per year. That would result in 27.4 million annually for everyone else.

And then in our third and final year, 2018, we could increase even less County taxes by 25%, which again will result in my paying \$48 more. I would now be paying a total of \$240 a year, which is \$20 a month for all of the County services that I receive and that would result in a Countywide increase of another 27.3 million. If you add it up it adds up to 83.2 million going over three years and I only went from paying \$7.83 a month to \$20 a month. I know I need to wrap up. But this formula would close the General Fund and police gaps in three to four years.

In the long term it is necessary to focus on those taxing jurisdictions that have created the problem and AME, my union, is willing to work with you in resolving these issues for all of Suffolk County residents. There are many people we can blame and many ideas that didn't work but the bottom line is better targeted towards solutions, we are here to work alongside the Suffolk County Legislators, we hope we can work together. Thank you ladies and gentlemen.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Thank you. Okay, that's it for the cards. Are there -- is there anyone else that would like to speak? Okay. Also, do we have anything from Budget Review that they would like to present to us? The answer is no. And since there is no one in the audience but we do have our Commissioner from Department of Social Services here and we have a couple of questions for you, Commissioner. Legislator Browning.

LEG. BROWNING:

I call John the performance management guru of Suffolk County, that's for sure, when it comes to social services.

John, if you'd kind of like to give us, you know, obviously you know how your budget is going, you know, the issue with Safety Net, if there's any way you could provide us with any information on how we could close that Safety Net gap where we just can't, you know, I can't see that we're going to be able to restore that -- that money. Personally, I don't think we should because I think we need to get the State to go back to doing the 50/50 share. But if you have a little bit of information you could provide for us that would be great.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL

Sure. Good afternoon, Members of the Legislature. There's a couple of things so at the last Human Service Committee meeting, I'll just reiterate what I said there, I'll start there. The Department of Social Services, and in conjunction with the County Executive's Office, we submitted to New York State a waiver for certain Safety Net families and individuals. So the rationale is there's a TANF block grant that comes down from the feds to New York State, New York State distributes it to the counties. And the purpose of that is -- was with -- was with the program, which is the Personal Work Responsibility Act. So what has happened as a result of that is at that time when it was executed certain states opted for Safety Net; most didn't, so what we're finding is some families come from out-of-state or from out-of-County within New York State and go to other counties so we're asking for any Safety Net family to be charged against the TANF block grant, which is federal dollars so it's zero impact to New York State, zero impact to Suffolk County, obviously in terms of cost, the benefit is obviously 71% or 71 cents on every dollar. So we've asked that for out-of-County, out-of-State. We also asked for anybody that has a temporary or permanent disability, currently it's permitted if somebody is permanently disabled, they have to go to SSID and we actually help them do that in our DCAP Program with Disabled Client Assistance

Program.

So we're asking two pieces there, the first is that if somebody's temporarily or permanently disabled but doesn't reach the level of SSID, we could charge them to the TANF block grant.

Also a second piece of that would be anybody that applies for SSID, we go back to the application date and if they are approved for SSID we can recoup our expenses back that way as well. We've asked for anybody that -- that's a single that has a permanent or temporary disability again to be waived and there be zero cost to the State if (inaudible) do that. So that's a couple of the more recent, what I'll call, legislative program type changes we're asking for.

So some of the current issues that we have ongoing is that, as I mentioned, our DCAP Program, we actually started looking at the Safety Net Singles a few years back on this and the Safety Net Singles continue to increase over the last three or four years, it's down slightly from last year, basically flat, but down from two or three years ago the high. What we've done is we actually moved a staff member over to work in the DCAP unit to handle Safety Net Singles in Smithtown, which we didn't have the coverage for to process them quicker.

The second item to date has yielded probably the most benefit is a reduction in Safety Net fair hearing backlog. So if we -- if DSS sanctions a client for not appearing for an employment, either at SWEP training or the actual employment interview, the individual will be sanctioned and if the client doesn't agree with it they can ask for a fair hearing. When the client asks for a fair hearing, there is what is called a aid-to-continue or ATC as we call it. So the aid-to-continue continues to be paid to the client until such time that the fair hearing is rendered and a decision is made. New York State is responsible for scheduling the hearings and they were taking an extremely long period of time to do it. From March of 2014 to November of 2014 the backlogs increased from 363 fair hearings, this is total fair hearings for all programs, to 1,081. The backlog includes Safety Net cases and they're supposed to be adjudicated fair hearings within 90 days, that's a regulatory requirement. So we actually started working with the State and we actually started sending them a list of cases that we wanted to be put on the docket first, if you will, and obviously Safety Net cases were the type of cases we put on there first. So having said that, that backlog is now down to 339 as of May 31st, 2015, and in June and July it's been around 250. So we've seen these backlogs decrease. So basically it was eight months instead of three months to take it -- to get it adjudicated. We typically win somewhere between 84 to 80% of our fair hearings so we're just not, you know, going there and losing so we're winning when we go there because we follow regs and now we all we're asking is for the State to partner with us and they have done a pretty good job in the last six to nine months in an allowing us to get these cases docketed more quickly and it's savings to the County.

The other thing we did was we increased staffing in the housing permanency unit, we were able to transfer over a person, actually two persons, from the Medicaid unit where our caseloads are declining and through this year for families and singles we have roughly 120 families and singles to permanency, last year at this time it was about 53.

So those are the current initiatives we've employed, there's also a couple of more. As you may or may not be aware of the County DSS issued an RFP for transitional recovery homes because we were finding that clients would be -- go to these alleged sober homes, which is kind of a misnomer, and DSS has no control over sober homes. So we figure if somebody's really serious about overcoming their substance abuse or alcohol addiction, we would find a place for them. So we RFP'd out, asked for folks to come in do transitional recovery homes in combination with the Sober Home Oversight Committee, the County Legislature Sober Oversight Committee with -- Legislator Browning and Legislator Martinez are part of and we were able to secure four providers. Currently we have two homes up and running, one for males, one for females. We believe that this is the first

ever all female transitional recovery home that's been opened in New York State to this point and we're hoping to open two more and by placing clients into these sober homes, our transitional recovery homes, they're not sober homes, it's actually cheaper than temporary emergency housing and we're also providing them the direct services they need as opposed to putting them to temporary housing where they may get some services but not 100% dedicated to their substance abuse issue.

The other item we've implemented as well is in -- we've been piloting this in our centers, we started in the Coram center then Southwest center is an EVR program where if -- this is just for a small portion of the clients if they cannot provide background on where they're -- about their resources, financial or housing resources, we have an SIU investigator interview them, this was something that was done in elsewhere New York County -- New York State County and we've replicated that program, we got this program approved by New York State OTDA to allow us to do this and basically what we found is that we've been able to see a reduction of 8% in those applications being processed because of not being able to meet the regulation of providing the background data that is needed to apply for temporary housing.

So those are the current programs, we just started them, most of them in late summer, you know, early fall here, which, you know, July, August, September, so we've seen some success. A future initiative is we went out, we RFP'd out for what we call our Safe Beds Program. So we always see that in the wintertime there's always an increase in -- in the need for temporary housing so we actually worked, we had three responders, two folks were -- were past qualified and of the additional 25 slots where folks can stay overnight and be able to be guided to services in the next morning and that'll be cheaper than putting them in a motel where they won't have any access to services.

So those are the current, future initiatives that we're working on as well as we've been -- and a lot of these came out in result of the POET Safety Net that we've been doing for Safety Net costs and we continue to go through that process, we're about 95% of the way through at this point, the POET Safety Net, we hope to have a couple of more initiatives but those are the ones I can speak with real clarity on.

LEG. BROWNING:

Okay, thank you. You just -- you just keep making things happen and I appreciate it.

I have to say this weekend I -- I made a phone call for -- to see if we can get from APS caseworkers to go out, there's a senior citizen couple that I saw walking down the street with the shopping carts and I called to if someone could come out and find out how they were doing, what was going on with them. There is no APS workers on the weekend?

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL

That could very well be in Emergency Services. We do have CPS workers. We have workers, staffing there 24/7, but, probably more like, you know --

LEG. BROWNING:

Right. This was on Sunday and I believe there was only two CPS workers, this was in the evening probably around 6:30, 7 o'clock. But I guess there was only two CPS workers available that day -- at that time of the day and, you know, obviously they were long gone before I could even get to talk to anybody.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL

Sure.

LEG. BROWNING:

But obviously with the cold weather, it was a cold night, and I've seen the couple before, I don't know where they're going, but obviously with the colder nights coming in that's my concern is where are they.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL

Understood. If I could just jump in real quickly. One of the things the Department rolled out actually this year for the first time ever was proactive homeless outreach so we partnered with Suffolk County Police Department and they obviously know of places where they see homeless as well, a lot of times they can't get to them because they're on another more urgent call serving the public. So actually what we did is we've actually schedule homeless outreach with the Police Department, they give us the addresses so it could be scheduled, it's more beneficial to them on days to go out, lower type of volume days for them, and so we go around and we have scheduled the entire 2015 and we go out and we do some proactive homeless outreach.

But specifically for this with APS on the weekend, I mean, obviously it's a skeleton crew, if it's something we see a need for we would absolutely address it and put somebody on, an APS worker on, to see the need for it. Again APS, quite frankly, is going to be something that's -- there's going to be more need in the future and you'll see actually in the budget one of the judges from Family Court asked for an increase in the contract for APS guardianship. Suffolk County's an aging population and with that there's going to be a higher demand for APS services and that's -- that's just the demographics. It's not unique to Suffolk, same for Westchester and Nassau County.

LEG. BROWNING:

Do we still backfill the CPS positions as they -- we used to, I believe.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:

Yes, the Department submits request for caseworker positions, we typically try to hire in batches of four because if we're going to train somebody it's better to train four, five, six, seven, eight at once, rather than one-on-one training from that perspective. So the Department absolutely puts in for workers for CPS, APS workers, caseworkers, if you will, automatic backfill, yes, I received backfills this year, off the top of my head, I believe it's about seven for caseworkers, I haven't had any filled in the last month or two.

LEG. BROWNING:

Okay. And one last question; food stamp fraud. As you know, I know somebody had asked that question in the work group was about the food stamp fraud and the various fraud cases that too often we have to turn it over to the State to do the investigation.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:

Sure.

LEG. BROWNING:

Is there a way that, we, at Suffolk County because I know when there's reimbursement money coming back we wind up losing and it and they get it.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:

Yeah, okay. So, yeah, let me explain. What you're saying is absolutely true. So the SNAP Food Stamps Program is run by the USDA federal government agency. The USDA, this agency does not allow the County to do provider fraud, we have to do recipient fraud. So, obviously, you get a bigger bang for your buck if you go after the vendor because there may be ten, 20, 30 people going there, right, so it's a -- it's a lot easier to work that way then to work one individual at a time. So the way the fraud works, so we're actually part of -- we actually do a -- a Medicaid, OMIG,

demonstration project, which, and I'll -- this kind of gets to your point, that's why I'm using this, even though we're talking about SNAP. So there's a demonstration project that we opted into, a lot of counties opted into in the beginning and then a lot of counties opted out. Why did they opt-out of fraud project? Well, because the way it works is that if we catch somebody committing fraud and there's recoveries the feds have to cover their costs, the states have to cover their costs, and we get -- we get what is ever left, so you know what that is right? Zero. So, however, we feel it's important to do that type of work so we continue to do it even though, you know, it doesn't yield the benefit we would like in terms of recoveries back to the local district, in this case, Suffolk County DSS.

LEG. BROWNING:

However you have employees that are working on this with them.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:

Yes.

LEG. BROWNING:

They should at least reimburse their salary.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:

Well, they do, they do, but the idea is we like to be, you know, reimbursed for the recoveries as well. It's our work, our workers.

LEG. BROWNING:

Right. Well, thank you John. I have no more questions.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:

If I could just say regarding the SNAP, I think, you know, two ways to go there is we work with our federal colleagues, senators, the representatives and ask them if they could run a pilot program in Suffolk where they could give us some grant money where we can hire some investigators to go out and do provider fraud and let the local district do the provider fraud. It's a federal program, they should give us the money to do that.

The other thing is that I'm on actually on a work group called IES, Integrated Eligibility System, the State is looking to revamp their, what they call WMS or Welfare Management System and I'm on the workgroup and one of the things I'm asking for and other Commissioners, not just me, but I was the first one to bring it up so I'll take credit for it, is that I would like them to provide a feed of a income of recipients that are applying like they do for Medicaid, that's part of the new Medicaid system, that they get a feed from the U.S. Treasury. So I would like a the same feed when this new system comes out so that we can more quickly access data to validate information.

LEG. BROWNING:

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Question, just quickly, what was the acronym, we spoke about this yesterday exactly what, the question that you just asked, Legislator Browning, what is it exactly the -- the position for the --

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:

Investigator, SIU, Special Investigators Unit, SIU investigator.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Kate, I think we have some work to do.

LEG. BROWNING:

Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Thank you, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER O'NEILL:

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:

Okay. Any other questions? All right, so that concludes the Human Services part so that's recessed and we will move onto Health.

HEALTH OPERATING BUDGET HEARING

CHAIRMAN SPENCER:

Good afternoon. We'll now open the Health budget hearings. It is there anyone that wishes to be heard from regarding any budgetary items within the Department of Health? I have no cards at this time. Is there anyone that wishes to be heard? Going once, going twice. Okay. I understand the Commissioner is out of town at this time. Is there anyone from the Health Department administration that has any items that they would like to share or any particular concerns?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MERMELSTEIN:

Good afternoon.

CHAIRMAN SPENCER:

Good afternoon.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MERMELSTEIN:

I'm Dr. Linda Mermelstein here on behalf of Commissioner Tomarken.

CHAIRMAN SPENCER:

So as far as with the budget within the Department of Health are you satisfied that -- with the recommended budget that you're able to address your needs, concerns for this upcoming year?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MERMELSTEIN:

Yes. We understand that this is very difficult budget year.

CHAIRMAN SPENCER:

Uh-huh.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MERMELSTEIN:

But we have been working very closely with the County Executive's Budget Office and this is definitely a budget that we can live with as recommended. We just had one area of concern and that was with regard to the 4310 contract agencies. There was a 2% cut that we feel needs to be restored. These -- this includes 19 agencies that would total about \$53,800 and we receive State funding for these agencies based on our maintenance of effort requirements and in accordance with New York State Mental Hygiene Law, the State may reduce the State aid if -- just to align with the local government aid reductions thereby negating the intended savings.

CHAIRMAN SPENCER:

Craig, you have --

MR. FREAS:

Yeah, this is a recommendation we would have put in, there was little bit of a misunderstanding between -- on my part of -- of some of -- some of the funds that needed to be restored because of the risk of law -- of penalties for maintenance, it's an {effort}, there's one recommendation in there but this would you be additional to that but it -- we certainly agree with the departments assessment in this case.

CHAIRMAN SPENCER:

Would they -- is there any -- on the administration would there be -- if these are funded or potentially restoring this would be aided? Is there any concern from the administration point of view?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MERMELSTEIN:

I don't believe so.

CHAIRMAN SPENCER:

No? Okay. All right. Where do we stand with streamlining? Legislator Browning had a concern.

LEG. BROWNING:

Yeah, I think Christina got a call, Shannon's gotten calls from me. I think we've had like three or four businesses over the past few months, you know, new businesses trying to open up and Health Department issues. I remember there was one, it was a requirement on the part of the business owners, the one by the Hess gas station out in the Manorville area, but what -- okay, we heard all about the streamlining in the Health Department to help businesses to reopen and get open soon and, you know, I keep hearing from business owners are saying I, you know --

CHAIRMAN SPENCER:

(Inaudible)

LEG. BROWNING:

-- with the permit process -- and, thank you for that.

CHAIRMAN SPENCER:

(Inaudible)

LEG. BROWNING:

What have we done? Because it certainly doesn't seem like it's working and, you know, again when businesses are calling and saying, *I'm not getting anywhere, I'm still having a problem.* What was this health permit streamlining process supposed to do?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAPOBIANCO:

Okay. Thank you, Legislator Browning. Yes, there have been several phone calls from your office with businesses that needed assistance and I think we're able to help them.

In July of '14 the Office of Waste Water Management did start a new procedure where instead of accepting every application into the system, they have a -- a review process where they -- it's a pre-application process and they review the applications, they see if they're complete or if they have any material defects, then they meet or call the design professional for the business who's submitting the application, they sit down with them and they show them where the application is insufficient and they send them back to -- to the drawing board, so to speak, and then they resubmit the application. On the re-submittal, there's a lot less time spent by our engineers because they've already been through it and have told the applicant what needs to be done.

From July of '14 through the early part of '15, the new process did work very well and we got the backlog down to as little as a two-week turnaround time, which was our goal. Unfortunately, early -- earlier this year we had the unexpected loss of an engineer who left who was fully trained. The administration worked with us, we got another engineer on board as quickly as we could but it's a very complicated -- Sanitary Code, as you know, it takes three to six months to get an engineer fully trained and productive and we've -- we're at that point now and we are tackling our backlog and it's much less than it had been and we hope to be back to our two-week backlog by the end of the year.

LEG. BROWNING:

So, you know, as you know, we just recently sent one, it's a woman who wants to open up a food truck and I think there must be a communication disconnect somewhere because, again, she said that the -- I guess sanitarian Inspector came out to inspect and when she first started, you know, she was told, *well, you know, you need this size of a vent*, so she put that one in and she said she spent like about \$20,000 on this food truck already in requirements and then -- now she's got a new Inspector and the new Inspector comes and says, *well, you didn't need that big of a vent*. So this is another thing that I keep hearing is and, *well, you have to have the sinks and this is where you need to have your sinks* and she, you know, she said I did everything like I was told and then a different person came and said something different.

So is there like a standard sheet, say it's a food truck, is there a standard sheet, you have this type of a vehicle, things have to be, you know, this is the way it should be. Because when you're spending that kind of money, and she's still not out there yet, so -- and I -- I believe, you know, she -- to us she said *I've done everything, everything that I've been required to do I've done*, but now she's having to go back and redo some things. So and I can tell you it's not even just the food trucks, a lot of times it's the restaurants, and the, you know, the ice cream store, the Italian ice store, and it's, well, yeah, I was told by this guy this is the way I had to do things and then he retired so now somebody else came in and gave me a whole different story. And not only it's *well, no, that's not quite the way it needed to be but now you have to do this on top of that*. And it's -- it just makes it so frustrating and then we the phone calls and I can guarantee you every Legislator's gotten the phone calls. When you want to talk streamlining can we talk about trying to streamline, and I know it's probably doesn't -- it's not as easy as it sounds how and it can be done but, you know, say like for example, a food truck, you know, it's a small truck, there's only so much room and surely there has to be specific requirements that it should be not be different from one Inspector to another.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAPOBIANCO:

Yes, I agree it should be consistent and, you know, by all means if you have an issue we can address it with this particular vendor. We do on-line have various guidance memos and perhaps we can investigate whether there needs to be guidance memo for these type of small vendors with a simpler process that they -- they could follow. We have, you know -- we do this for other areas of wastewater.

LEG. BROWNING:

You know we are dependent on these businesses to open up and collect their sales tax.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAPOBIANCO:

I understand. We do try to help them get up and running.

LEG. BROWNING:

I know. But, you know, whatever you can do to help these businesses get online and get moving and, you know, to spend that kind of money and, you know, she's showing me her food truck's parked at the back of her home because she can't go anywhere yet, it's not been approved so and I

think she started about a year ago. So that's a bit of a problem.

And, so, whatever we have we can do to help them and it would be good to not have to get those phone calls saying, *I need your help*. And, you know, well, I know we all do it and we all do what we have to do to get them, you know, to get their businesses up and running but, again, I think it would be nice to see that the Department's able to get them up and running without our phone calls. And, so, I'd appreciate anything you can do.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAPOBIANCO:

Yes, we certainly will look into it.

CHAIRMAN SPENCER:

Any other comments from my colleagues? So I think that my bigger concern and, I appreciate the budget, I know we've dealt with the healthcare centers and that's been a major step forward, but just looking globally because I've made those phone calls and so, you know, where we have a Department of Health that has to weigh in on wastewater, that has to weigh in on development issues, that has to weigh in on restaurants that are opening, it has to inspect restaurants. And I said this privately, I'll say it publicly in more of a -- just a supportive -- as far -- instead of a critical nature, the idea that we would have a department that has projects that are hundreds of millions of dollars that every day we'll see a substantial cost and interest and so not only do you have a sales tax issue, you have just developers and people that are invested and that one person can cause our entire permit process to go from two weeks to a major backlog is -- not only do we have to get this person up to speed but that can never happen again and if it happens once, it's one thing, but you're just so critically important. And so to look at whatever the salary is, you know, if we look at salary and benefits, if it's 100,000 or 200,000 or whatever we have to have, there has to be a backup in place. And, you know, I understand that we don't want to have a system where we charge money to expedite because we want to have equal access of it, we want to be fair and we don't want people to -- we're not looking at trying to use fees as a way of balancing our budget, make it harder on business owners, but when you look at some of these huge projects that will cost them more money in a day waiting, they're happy to pay whatever fee is necessary to put us in a position to expedite to get these things going.

So I -- you know, and I'm going to ask about it, every Health Committee meeting I'm going to ask structurally, we can't have a health permit process that we revamp, we put a computer system in place and you say one guy retires and we get a three-month backlog? You know, so one time I get it, but that can never happen again. I mean, that -- just as a representative, I will -- you know, we can't have that happen again.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAPOBIANCO:

Yes, Legislator Spencer, I understand your concerns and we have taken other measures to prevent this from happening again. We were fortunate to receive a DEC grant and we were able to hire another assistant engineer --

CHAIRMAN SPENCER:

Awesome.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAPOBIANCO:

-- and that is for our innovative alternative off -- onsite disposal system but this engineer is being trained also in wastewater management so if someone, you know, does leave suddenly or get ill there is cross-training.

CHAIRMAN SPENCER:

Oh, excellent.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CAPOBIANCO:

And also under that grant we were also able to hire a sanitarian who can assist with the inspections of these as well so we are putting resources, additional resources to this -- this issue.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MERMELSTEIN:

We very much appreciate your support.

CHAIRMAN SPENCER:

And you'll always have it, you guys do a great job. So, you know, I think that we can -- oh, Legislator Browning, she has another question.

LEG. BROWNING:

No, just it's actually a BRO but maybe you guys could stay. Your recommendations for the Jail Medical and when -- you're actually saying here to increase overtime salaries for the Jail Medical Unit.

MR. FREAS:

Correct.

LEG. BROWNING:

And I guess this kind of falls into the transferring to Hudson River our health centers. How are we doing as far as moving employees from the County health centers to Jail Medical? Have we -- how many nurses, how many employees have we actually moved over because wouldn't that change your need for overtime?

MR. FREAS:

Yes, and if you look at the recommendation and the section that talks about that particular recommendation I believe I recommended 115,000 increase in 2015, which would be before Riverhead closes and before those people would have some impact and then a \$75,000 increase in 2016 based on the fact that probably there'll be some migration in personnel from the closing Riverhead Health Center into Jail Medical and that should reduce overtime some.

LEG. BROWNING:

Okay and how are we doing as far as the transfer?

MS. CULP:

Hi, I'm Jen Culp with the Commissioner's Office. We had transferred some staff from the Brentwood Health Center, which was I guess, just about a little over a month ago, and then Riverhead staff will be transitioning on November 2nd is the transition date. Right now we have approximately five nurses that will be reassigned to the Jail Medical Units. We met with the staff October 2nd and everyone received their reassignments, in addition to the nurses there's some other medical support staff, like medical assistants and then also some medical records clerks, which will help. As Craig mentioned we do expect to see decreases in overtime as a result of the additional staff coming over, not immediately because they'll be training.

But, in addition to that, we're also beginning to really look at our productivity at the jail. We're looking at our operations. We're at a point right now where we feel pretty good about staffing. So now's a really good time for us to look and say how are we doing productivity wise, what do our operations look like and how we can make sure we're operating most efficiently and in the best interest of the patients.

LEG. BROWNING:

And is that going to reduce the number of contract agency employees that you're going to be using?

MS. CULP:

Yes, that would also -- we saw a significant reduction in the contract agency when Tri-Community transitioned and then what we -- expect to continue to see that as well.

LEG. BROWNING:

Okay, thank you.

CHAIRMAN SPENCER:

One last question on our health centers. I think that the, you know, we did the transfer to the FQHC and with the Dolan we did kind of a five-year sort of transition, spend-down, and so that they have been decreased a certain amount and they signed kind of a -- they signed an agreement for that. Is that correct? They signed a contract?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MERMELSTEIN:

They have a five-year contract.

CHAIRMAN SPENCER:

They have a five-year contract. And so in fairness, to them, you know, they did this, it was painful, they took the contract. One of the suggestions that I'm seeing and just to our Budget Review, if we have a contract is one of the suggestions that we actually cut the Dolan further? In terms of our -- is there a suggestion that we break our contract?

MR. FREAS:

I don't believe we made that recommendation.

CHAIRMAN SPENCER:

Okay, okay. All right.

MR. FREAS:

No, I don't think we made any recommendations with respect to the health center contracts this year.

CHAIRMAN SPENCER:

Okay. I heard that was one of -- I know that there's -- I just wanted to -- but there is a contract there and, you know, they're, you know, it was painful to them but we have to keep our word if we have a contract. Okay, very good. Thank you.

That's all I have. Seeing no other comments from my colleagues and no other public remarks, the Health Committee Budget hearing is recessed or closed.

MR. RICHBERG:

Adjourned.

CHAIRMAN SPENCER:

It's closed.

(*The meeting was adjourned at 1:48 p.m.*)