

# Suffolk County Legislature



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## WELFARE TO WORK COMMISSION

of the Suffolk County Legislature  
c/o Clerk of the Legislature  
725 Veterans Memorial Highway  
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March 14, 2014

To: Members of the Suffolk County Legislature:

Attached please find the Welfare to Work Commission's 2014 annual report that we are required to file with the Legislature. The report also contains our goals for 2014. As you can see from both the 2014 goals and the summary of our 2013 activities, the Commission has been very active and will continue to focus on these major priorities:

1. Raising public awareness about poverty in Suffolk County with special attention to the needs of working-poor people, as contained in our report, "Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County."
2. Securing adequate funding for child care toward the goal of providing quality early-learning and child-care experiences for preschool children in Suffolk County.
3. Assessing education and training placements for DSS and DOL clients to help them achieve self-sufficiency.
4. Monitoring staffing levels at DSS, DOL and DOH to ensure proper delivery of services.
5. Assessing and adjusting DSS and DOL policies with regard to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), through the ADA policy that the Commission is proposing.
6. Reviewing County housing policies and opportunities with special attention to persons with special needs.
7. Assessing County public transportation in terms of the needs of working-poor people.

The Welfare to Work Commission generally meets monthly; sometimes more often through our standing committees. All Commission members are volunteers who, individually or through their agencies, contribute hundreds of hours toward creating policies and practices that support people leaving welfare for work and working poor people in Suffolk.

Yours truly for the Commission,

*Richard Koubek*

Richard Koubek, PhD, Chair

*Kathy Liguori*

Kathy Liguori, Vice Chair



## **Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature**

# **2013 Annual Report and 2014 Goals**

**March 2014**

As required by the 15<sup>th</sup> Resolve of Resolution No. 181-2003, the Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature is pleased to submit its annual report containing the Commission's goals for 2014 and a summary of its activities for 2013.

### **Commission 2014 Goals**

1. Continue to disseminate the Commission's report, "Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County" with a special 2014 focus on the impacts that poverty has on children in Suffolk County, while pursuing these prioritized recommendations in the report:
  - a. Review the SCDSS and the SCDOL Employment Program with special attention to assessing and expanding educational opportunities for clients.
  - b. Continue to focus on the quality, availability and affordability of child care for Public Assistance recipients and working-poor families and coordinate with the County Executive and Legislature for a unified advocacy campaign to change the New York State Office of Children and Family Services block grant formula that negatively impacts Suffolk families.
  - c. Create a County task force to coordinate child-care services with the economic-development plans of the County.

- d. Review and make recommendations about staffing levels and access to services at the Suffolk County Department of Social Services (SCDSS), Suffolk County Department of Labor (SCDOL) and Suffolk County Department of Health (SCDOH).
  - e. Monitor the privatization of the County's health centers under Hudson River Health Care and its impact on the provision of health-care services in Suffolk County.
  - f. Monitor Suffolk bus service as it relates to the needs of poor and near-poor people.
  - g. Continue to assess implementation of the recommendations for the creation of affordable housing contained in the Commission's 2007 report with special attention to people with special needs.
2. Release a report with recommendations to the Legislature from the 2013 focus groups and public hearings, "Who's Minding the Kids? Meeting Challenges ... Creating Opportunities for Quality Child Care and Early Learning in Suffolk County."
  3. Continue working with DSS toward adoption and implementation of a new DSS Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) policy. Monitor the effectiveness of the ADA "Did You Know?" brochure intended to educate individuals applying for public assistance about their rights and opportunities under the ADA and the new nonprofit liaison communication lines crafted by the Commission's Employment Assessment Committee in cooperation with SCDSS and SCDOL.
  4. Continue to assess implementation of the recommendations in the Commission's 2010 sober homes report regarding policies and procedures to improve the oversight and delivery of services at sober homes in Suffolk County.

## **Commission 2013 Activities**

### **"Struggling in Suburbia" Report**

The Commission disseminated its report, "Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County," through formal presentations to the Suffolk County Legislature's Human Services, Health, Public Works and Transportation Committees and to the Suffolk County Planning Commission as well as to the Newsday and Cablevision editorial boards. Several editorials followed, supporting the report's Sunday bus service and child-care recommendations. The report was also distributed to professional and academic organizations such as the Rauch Foundation, Hofstra University's National Center for Suburban Studies and Adelphi University's Vital Signs Project and was featured at the Long Island Jobs with Justice annual "Working But Still Poor" conference where an education and advocacy toolkit based on the report was released. In December, PBS Weekend NewsHour launched a series on poverty in America to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the "War on Poverty." The second story in this series which focused on suburban poverty and the Commission's report was aired in January, 2014. In the fall of 2013, Chair Richard Koubek presented the report at the Hofstra University School of Communication's "Covering Suburban Poverty" conference and at the Council on Prejudice Reduction conference. Mr. Koubek was also invited to present the report at the June 2014 SUNY Stony Brook conference, "How Class Works" as well as at an EOC-Long Island luncheon in 2014 commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the War on Poverty.

## **Child Care**

**CCBG Formula:** An analysis of State underfunding of Suffolk child-care as well as recommendations for increased State funding were among the main focal points of the Commission's poverty report. Pursuing this issue, the Commission continued to encourage the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) Commissioner to change the Child Care Block Grant (CCBG) formula that negatively impacts Suffolk County. Since 2008 Suffolk County has lost \$5 million in State funds. The Commissioner responded with a strong defense of the formula, prompting another letter requesting additional funds for Suffolk. The Commission welcomed County Executive Steve Bellone's decision to provide \$3.5 million in County additional child-care subsidies, thereby allowing the eligibility to be raised to 125% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL.) Soon thereafter, the Commission was pleased by the OCFS decision to increase Suffolk's CCBG funding for 2013-2014 by \$1 million, resulting in the eligibility rising to 150% of FPL, still short of the 200% of FPL threshold that had been in place through 2011.

**Child-Care Hearings:** The Commission took note of President Barak Obama's call in his 2013 State of the Union Address for expanded Early Learning. In the summer of 2013 the Commission voted to conduct public hearings on this issue. A special committee was assembled for this purpose, consisting of a dozen prominent Long Island child-care experts. Five focus groups for parents and providers were held in November, followed by two public hearings in December, 2013 at the legislative chambers in Hauppauge and Riverhead. The hearings received eight hours of testimony from 18 government, agency, academic and industry experts as well as members of the public. The hearings received coverage in Newsday. A parent survey was developed and distributed, receiving 126 responses. A report is currently being prepared for release to the Legislature in 2014.

## **Sunday Bus Service**

One of the recommendations in the Commission's poverty report was to establish Sunday bus service in Suffolk County. In the spring of 2013, the Commission worked with Legislator Jay Schneiderman, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, Vision Long Island and Long Island Jobs with Justice to apply additional State bus funding toward Sunday service. With the cooperation of the Legislature and the Bellone Administration, these funds, along with a federal grant, were dedicated to begin County-wide Sunday bus service on ten critical arteries, starting in January, 2014.

## **IDA Scoring Tool**

Another poverty report recommendation was that the Suffolk IDA utilize a scoring tool to assess business applications for Industrial Development Agency (IDA) grants or tax abatements. The tool would evaluate community benefits offered by these companies to assist working-poor people in Suffolk. Following the August presentation to the Suffolk Planning Commission, Chair David Calone arranged for a conference call with IDA President Anthony Manetta, who invited the Commission to submit a draft scoring tool. A committee was assembled to do so. The draft tool was submitted to Mr. Manetta in February 2014 and is currently being evaluated.

## **Understaffing at SCDSS**

Several recommendations were made in the poverty report for restoration of Suffolk County Department of Social Services (DSS) staff that had been eliminated over the past several years. While funding was not available for these restorations, the Commission did send a letter to the Legislature and testified on behalf of the legislative Budget Review Office's transferring funds within the 2014 County budget to preserve DSS staffing at current levels. The Legislature adopted this recommendation.

### **Employment Assessment and ADA Policies**

The Commission continued to review the SCDSS and SCDOL Employment Program, focusing on SCDSS intake assessment forms and procedures with the goal of improving mental-health and chemical-dependence assessments, compliance with the requirements of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and ultimately, to improve work and educational placements and reduce the number of DSS sanctions. The overall goal is to help Public Assistance recipients move toward self-sufficiency. Having worked closely with outgoing Commissioner Greg Blass and members of the DSS staff in 2012, the Employment Assessment Committee finalized a draft Americans with Disabilities (ADA) policy, based on the Onondaga and Chautauqua Counties' DSS/ADA policies, which the Commission believes will clarify and make more efficient SCDSS procedures for identifying clients with disabilities, informing disabled clients of their ADA rights and making appropriate accommodations in work assignments that serve the special needs of these disabled clients. The Commission submitted the draft to then Acting Commissioner John O'Neill in September, 2013 and, as of the date of this report, is awaiting Commissioner O'Neill's review of the proposed ADA policy.

### **Sober Homes**

Commission member Dr. Jeffrey Reynolds co-chairs the County Sober Homes Oversight Board which was created in 2011 on a recommendation contained in the Commission's 2010 sober homes report that called attention to the problems caused by unregulated and unsafe sober homes in Suffolk County. In the fall, Dr. Reynolds provided the Commission with an update on the work of the Board and the continuing frustration with the State Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services' refusal to accept regulatory oversight of sober homes. He also profiled the difficulties that the County has had establishing a workable coterie for enhanced payments to sober homes that agree to certain quality standards.

### **DSS Shelter Policies**

The Commission took up two issues related to DSS homeless shelter policies: (1) the opening of new congregate shelters; (2) the DSS criteria used to determine eligibility for admission to a homeless shelter. Some Commission members welcomed the opening of the congregate shelters that have been resisted for years due to the opposition of local civic groups. The Commission was pleased to learn that the smaller shelter providers will continue to serve DSS homeless clients. The Commission believes that the question of whether homeless people are better served by large shelters with more services or in smaller shelters with more intimate and personal services is worthy of further study. The Commission also explored the responsibilities of local school districts under the federal McKinney-Vento Act. While there were some questions raised by members about the DSS application of homeless shelter eligibility criteria, the Commission was pleased to learn that

constructive conversations were taking place between SCDSS, the County Attorney, Nassau Suffolk Law Services, and the Empire Justice Center to address these changes. The conversations have focused on the local shelter policy to ensure that the policy conforms with state regulations and state administrative directives and that OTDA eligibility criteria are properly interpreted when DSS creates a Temporary Housing Assistance (THA) policy, which is used by DSS staff to determine THA program eligibility.

### **Conclusion**

The Commission meets monthly, always with a quorum, and has created several committees that also meet to pursue issues such as the Suffolk Poverty Hearings Committee, Child Care Committee and Employment Assessment Committee. We look forward to working with the Legislature in 2014 to continue our mission to “evaluate and make recommendations of federal, State and county policies and procedures to move people from welfare to work.”

Respectfully Submitted,

Legislator Monica Martinez, Chair, Human Services Committee  
Richard Koubek, Ph.D., Commission Chair, Gerald Ryan Outreach Center  
Kathy Liguori, Commission Vice Chair, Habitots Preschool and Child Care Centers

Marjorie Acevedo, For Presiding Officer DuWyane Gregory  
James Andrews, Suffolk County Department of Labor  
Sr. Lisa Bergeron, Catholic Charities  
Peggy Boyd, Family Service League  
Barbara Egloff, Eastern Suffolk BOCES  
Charles Fox, EOC of Suffolk County  
Don Friedman, Empire Justice Center  
Kimberly Gierasch, Suffolk County Department of Health  
Robert Greenberger, FECS Health and Human Services System  
Michael Haynes, Long Island Cares/The Harry Chapin Food Bank  
Debbie R. Joseph, Wyandanch Homes and Property Development Corporation  
Ellen Krakow, Nassau/Suffolk Law Services  
Nina Leonhardt, Suffolk County Community College  
John Nieves, Suffolk County Department of Social Services  
Gwen O’Shea, Health and Welfare Council of Long Island  
Ray O’Rourke, Suffolk County Workforce Investment Board  
Jeffrey Reynolds, Long Island Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence  
Michael Stoltz, Clubhouse of Suffolk  
Joan Travan, Suffolk County Association of Municipal Employees  
Luis Valenzuela, Long Island Council of Churches