

Suffolk County Legislature



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WELFARE TO WORK COMMISSION

of the Suffolk County Legislature
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March 18, 2016

To: Members of the Suffolk County Legislature:

The Welfare to Work Commission is pleased to provide you with our 2015 annual report as well as our 2016 Commission goals. As you can see in the attached report, the Commission was again very active in 2015, with these activities:

1. Continuing to disseminate our 2012 report, "Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County" while pursuing these prioritized report recommendations:
 - a. Expanding educational opportunities for SWEP clients by creating a pilot for the delivery of coordinated SWEP work experience, training and education and child-care services at Suffolk County Community College and Eastern Suffolk BOCES.
 - b. Making recommendations on staffing levels at SCDSS and SCDOL.
 - c. Monitoring the privatization of the County's health centers.
 - d. Supporting the expansion of Sunday and evening bus service.
2. Continuing to disseminate a major report, "Who's Minding the Kids? Meeting Challenges and Creating Opportunities for Quality Child Care and Early Learning in Suffolk County" and supporting the newly-created Suffolk County Child Care Commission.
3. Continuing to advocate for a change in the State's child-care funding formula that underfunds Suffolk County's child-care needs.
4. Supporting efforts to refine County and SCDSS "Americans with Disabilities Act" policies and procedures.
5. Exploring State policy changes that would remove disincentives to work from Child Support policies.

The Welfare to Work Commission generally meets monthly; sometimes more often through our committees, always with a quorum. 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 as well as 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

2015 Annual Report and 2016 Goals

March 2016

As required by the 15th 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 2016 and a summary of its activities for 2015.

Welfare to Work Commission's 2016 Goals

1. Continue to disseminate the Commission's report, "Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County," while pursuing these prioritized recommendations in the report:
 - a. 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).
 - b. 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.
 - c. Monitor Suffolk bus service as it relates to the needs of poor and near-poor people.

- d. Create a scoring tool to measure supports provided to working-poor people by companies seeking a Suffolk County IDA benefit.
2. Continue to pursue recommendations in the 2014 Commission report, "Who's Minding the Kids? Meeting Challenges and Creating Opportunities for Quality Child Care and Early Learning in Suffolk County," with special attention to these prioritized recommendations:
 - a. Supporting the newly-created Child Care Commission
 - b. Supporting increased State funding for child care while continuing to address inequities in Suffolk's State Child Care Block Grant (CCBG) allocation due to the flawed CCBG formula used by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS.)
3. Continue to plan, implement and evaluate a pilot for expanding on-site educational and work opportunities for work-eligible TANF and Safety Net (SN) SWEP clients at Suffolk Community College toward the goal of creating SCDSS/SCDOL "hub centers" for the delivery of multiple SWEP services, including work experience, education, training and child care.
4. Seek a New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) request for waivers from the federal Department of Health and Human Services to expand educational opportunities for SWEP clients, such as pursuit of a GED, that count as core activities.
5. Continue supporting adoption and refinement of Suffolk County and SCDSS "Americans with Disabilities Act" (ADA) policies and procedures. In addition:
 - a. 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.
 - b. Monitor the status and effectiveness of the nonprofit liaison communication lines crafted in 2012 by the Commission's Employment Assessment Committee in cooperation with SCDSS and SCDOL.
6. Continue to explore Federal and State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) Child Support policies toward the goal of eliminating or minimizing disincentives for non-custodial parents to work.
7. Explore barriers to housing for Suffolk residents with behavioral health challenges.

Activities Pursuant to the Commission's 2015 Goals

Pursue Recommendations in the "Struggling in Suburbia" Report

The Commission continued to pursue these recommendations in our 2012 poverty report, "Struggling in Suburbia: Meeting the Challenges of Poverty in Suffolk County,"

1. ***Expand educational opportunities for SWEP clients.*** The Commission pursued this poverty-report goal through the work of its Ad Hoc Suffolk Community College (SCCC) Committee. Due to previous efforts by the Commission, the Suffolk County Department of Social Services (SCDSS) and Suffolk County Department of Labor (SCDOL), opportunities have been created for Suffolk Works Employment Program (SWEP) clients to attend SCCC while they are also fulfilling their work requirement at SCCC. The Ad Hoc Committee expanded this program along with the concept of

creating an “SWEP Hub” at SCCC with expanded delivery of multiple services such as work experience, vocational and job training and child care. A pilot for this expanded program was launched in the spring of 2015. SCCC set aside 16 child-care slots for the pilot, although the Committee discovered that many SWEP clients prefer child care in their own neighborhoods primarily because SCCC child care is not available during summer and other vacation period. SCCC has filed for a grant to provide vacation-period child care, which might entice more SWEP clients to use this service. The Committee has also designed a flyer for distribution to all SWEP clients in 2016 announcing the SCCC pilot. During 2015, when compared with the same time period in 2014, the number of SWEP clients enrolled in SCCC while fulfilling their work assignments rose from 14 to 31 clients. In collaboration with the Committee, SCDSS also designed a flyer for distribution to all SWEP clients in 2016 announcing the SCCC pilot. The Committee hopes to build on this success in 2016. The pilot is scheduled to run through 2017.

2. **Recommendations about staffing levels at the SCDSS and SCDOL.** The Commission’s poverty report highlighted the need for appropriate staffing at SCDSS and SCDOL. Following release of County Executive Bellone’s 2016 budget, the Commission consulted with SCDSS and SCDOL as well as with the Legislature’s Budget Review Office and found that staffing levels were adequate for these departments in the proposed budget.
3. **Monitor the privatization of the County’s health centers.** The Commission recognizes the potential benefits that might accrue from the county health centers being managed by Hudson River Health Care and thereby becoming Federally Qualified Health Centers. However, the Commission’s poverty report recommended that this process of privatizing the health centers be monitored to insure the delivery of quality services. Focusing on the health centers within the context of Governor Andrew Cuomo’s Medicaid Reform Task Force transformation of New York’s health-care delivery system, The Commission received a detailed presentation at the its May meeting from Roberta Leiner and Nicole Jordan Martin of Hudson River Health Care (HRHC) which is assuming responsibility for all but one (Dolan) of the County’s health clinics. Among their salient points:
 - a. HRHC clinics provide primary-care health services to 25,000 low-income people annually, with that number expected to double in the course of the next few years. HRHC anticipates assuming oversight of the Brentwood and Riverhead clinics which will contribute to anticipated patient growth. HRHC has measurable outcomes to monitor care and is prioritizing making each health center a “one stop” center for primary, behavioral and preventive health care services. There is a sliding scale of fees based on income and that there is no requirement that patients be documented immigrants. In the transition from County-managed to HRHC managed centers, no workers lost their jobs, although some are no longer represented by the AME union.
 - b. New York State has adopted the Delivery Service Reform Incentive Payment (DSRIP) Project which originated with the federal government and is now being implemented in New York State to reduce what are the nation’s highest Medicaid costs. The core principles of DSRIP are to reduce expensive hospital stays by 25% over five years and emergency room visits with

preventive primary care that emphasizes a holistic approach to wellness rather than a “fee for service” delivery system.

- c. There are several centerpieces of DSRIP, including the designation of health-care clinics and providers as a “Patient Centered Medical Home” (PCMH) and Health Home. PCMH is a physician-driven, patient-centered health-delivery system in which each patient is treated holistically by one physician who heads a team. Health Home provides for the coordination of medical, behavioral, family and substance-abuse services across a network of community-based organizations such as the Suffolk County Association for Mental Health and Wellness or LI Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence or EOC. Each patient in PCMH and Health Home has a “care manager” who coordinates the delivery of services among the clinic as well as the community agencies.
4. **Monitor Suffolk bus service as it relates to the needs of poor and near-poor people.** The Commission’s poverty report emphasized the need for expanded bus service. Upon learning that the proposed 2016 County budget would contain a \$10 million reduction in funding for the Suffolk bus system, coupled with yet another demand by the County that New York State provide the \$10 million in additional funding that has been requested by the County Executive for three years, the Commission wrote to each Legislator and the County Executive asking that the \$10 million cut in County funds not be included in the 2016 budget while pledging to work with the County Executive and transportation advocates to secure the requested \$10 million funds for Suffolk buses in the 2016 State budget
5. **Score IDA applicants on their supports for working-poor people.** In 2014, the Commission drafted a scoring tool that the IDA could use to assess applications for IDA grants. The scoring tool included such categories as: hiring union workers, minority contractors and local workers; paying the County living wage; prioritizing economically-stressed communities; providing child-care assistance to workers; providing on-the-job training; hiring Public Assistance recipients and long-term unemployed workers. It is the Commission’s hope that this scoring tool might provide a model for all IDAs to use in Suffolk County and would thereby raise the standard for IDA grants at both the town and County levels. The tool was not submitted to the Suffolk IDA in 2015 due IDA and Suffolk Planning Commission leadership changes. The tool will be submitted to the IDA in 2016.

Child Care

1. **Child Care Commission:** In June of 2014 the Commission released a 90-page report, “Who’s Minding the Kids? Meeting Challenges and Creating Opportunities for Quality Child Care and Early Learning in Suffolk County” to County, State and federal officials, the child-care industry, academics and the public. A centerpiece of the report’s recommendations is creation of a Suffolk County Child Care and Early Learning Commission that would oversee implementation of the report’s recommendations. Throughout 2015, the Commission worked with Legislator Monica Martinez drafting a resolution to create a Suffolk County Child Care Commission. This resolution, IR 1023, was adopted unanimously by the Suffolk

County Legislature on February 9th, 2016. The Welfare to Work Commission will have a seat on this new Child Care Commission and will work to help launch the commission in 2016.

2. **CCBG Formula:** The Commission continued to assess the State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) Child Care Block Grant (CCBG) formula that has underfunded Suffolk County child care since 2008. In March, Commission Chair Richard Koubek and Vice Chair Kathy Liguori met with Robin Beller, Long Island Regional Director of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), to discuss the CCBG formula. Ms. Beller passed on the Commission's concerns to her superiors at OCFS.

ADA Policies at SCDSS

1. **County ADA Policy:** SCDSS has a highly rated Employment program (consistently in the top 5 or better in New York State.) In addition, the SCDSS sanctions figures percentagewise are relatively low compared to other districts. Nevertheless, the Commission continued to work with SCDSS and SCDOL toward improving mental-health and chemical-dependence assessments and compliance with the requirements of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) with the goal of improving work and educational placements and further reducing the number of SCDSS client sanctions. The Commission acknowledges that SCDSS has an OTDA approved ADA policy. With the leadership of Legislator Monica Martinez, Chair of the Legislature's Human Services Committee, the ADA discussions moved from the Welfare to Work Commission to the County Executive's offices toward the goal of creating a County-wide ADA policy that would then be tailored to the ADA needs of each County department.
2. **Interim SCDSS ADA Procedures:** Absent final determination of a County ADA policy, in July, SCDSS and the Commission reached agreement on these interim steps regarding ADA procedures at SCDSS:
 - a. SCDSS will modify the current SCDSS - ADA policy, "Procedure 899", which requires that in requests for ADA accommodations, "the SCDSS staff member must notify their immediate unit supervisor who will inform the Center Manager or designees ... [who] must make reasonable efforts to recognize potential disabilities ... and approve or deny the ADA accommodation request." The modification will reduce the current three step approval process to a one or two step approval process as follows:
 - i. Line workers will continue to offer or grant requests for an accommodation in situations where the disability and need for an accommodation is obvious and the specific accommodations to be given is simple and straightforward.
 - ii. In situations where the line worker is not sure whether an accommodation is needed or is not sure what specific accommodation should be given, he/she will notify the Center Manager who will assist the line worker in making a decision on the requested accommodation.
 - b. In situations where advocates have a question regarding an accommodation to be granted or not granted at a Center, the advocate

can call the Commissioner's Response Line where he/she will be referred to the SCDSS ADA compliance officer. Advocates or clients requesting an appeal should follow existing procedures.

Child Support

In 2014, the Commission took up the issue federal and state child-support regulations that sometimes are disincentives for SCDOL clients to work, or even serve as parents. In 2015, the Commission's Ad Hoc Child Support Committee discussed strategies for achieving three priorities to make the Child Care regulations more flexible and responsive to clients' needs: (1) Lowering the State and/or federal 9% interest rate imposed when a non-custodial parent fails to meet the child-support requirements; (2) Improving the State's call-in center that often provides misinformation as well as their website which is difficult to navigate; (3) Possibly requesting a waiver for non-custodial parents to pay the principal only and not interest on their child support during the first 6 to 12 months of work, thereby incentivizing them to work and meet their parental responsibilities. In the summer of 2015, the Commission sent a letter to Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan requesting a lowering of the 9% interest rate charged for noncustodial parents who are in arrears of their child-support payments. In September, Commission Chair Richard Koubek was contacted by David Gruenberg, counsel for the Republican Conference of the New York State Senate. Mr. Gruenberg said that the Commission's letter had generated quite a lot of discussion between Albany and the Senator's office. Mr. Gruenberg said that the Senator has political and legal concerns with our request but is open to discussion. They need empirical (rather than anecdotal) evidence that a significant number of noncustodial parents are abandoning work and/or their parental responsibilities as a result of the 9% interest charged on child-support arrears. In response, the Department of Labor reported that no records are kept as to whether non-custodial parents walk away from their parenting or work responsibilities as a result of the 9% interest rate. The Commission is pursuing other paths for gathering the data requested by Mr. Gruenberg. This issue will be pursued in 2016.

Sober Homes Update

In 2010, the Commission released a report on unregulated sober homes in Suffolk County. Unfortunately, the New York State Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) has refused to take legal, regulatory responsibility for sober homes. Absent State regulation, in June of 2015, the Commission received an update from SCDSS regarding a Suffolk County sober homes pilot. In this pilot, SCDSS circulated to sober home providers a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) offering an enhanced housing reimbursement not to exceed the congregate-care rate (twice the existing reimbursement rate) if they would agree to oversight such as unannounced inspections by SCDSS, zero-tolerance of drugs and alcohol, a house manager, overnight supervision, property upkeep and more. These homes will be called Transitional Recovery Homes. Four providers qualified for this pilot and one has already been launched for a women's Transitional Recovery Home with 8 beds.

Housing for Vulnerable Suffolk Residents

In the fall of 2015, the Commission revisited its 2007 report on the lack of affordable housing in Suffolk County, noting that little has been accomplished providing safe, affordable housing to very-low income residents earning under 50% of the Area Median Income. This housing vacuum was reinforced in November by SCDSS Commission John O’Neill who stated that the lack of affordable housing is a major cause of homelessness in Suffolk and a serious challenge to his Department’s ability to provide emergency, transitional and permanent housing for Public Assistance recipients and homeless individuals and families, whose numbers remain high and continue to rise. During several Commission meetings in the fall, the Commission narrowed its focus on this critical lack of housing options to perhaps the most-vulnerable Suffolk population – people with behavioral health challenges. A Supportive Housing Committee was formed to further explore this issue in 2016.

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 Report Committee, Child Care Committee and Employment Assessment Committee. We look forward to working with the Legislature, SCDSS, SCDOL and SCDOH in 2015 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, Education and Human Services Committee
Richard Koubek, Ph.D., Commission Chair, Gerald Ryan Outreach Center
Kathy Liguori, Commission Vice Chair, Habitots Preschool and Child Care Centers

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Olga Ayala, Suffolk County Department of Social Services
Sr. Lisa Bergeron, Catholic Charities
Peggy Boyd, Family Service League
Steve Chassman, Long Island Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence
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Charles Fox, EOC of Suffolk County
Don Friedman, Empire Justice Center
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Michael Haynes, Long Island Cares/The Harry Chapin Food Bank
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