

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

PUBLIC HEARING

ON THE

2009 OPERATING BUDGET

A Public Hearing on the 2009 Operating Budget was held at the William H. Rogers Legislature Building in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York, on October 8, 2008 at 10:00 a.m.

LEGISLATORS PRESENT:

Legislator Louis D'Amaro - Acting Chairman/17th Legislative District
Presiding Officer William Lindsay - 8th Legislative District
Legislator DuWayne Gregory - 15th Legislative District
Legislator Cameron Alden - 10th Legislative District
Legislator Jay Schneiderman - 2nd Legislative District

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

George Nolan - Counsel to the Legislature
Barbara LoMoriello - Deputy Clerk/Suffolk County Legislature
John Ortiz - Senior Budget Analyst/Budget Review Office
Kara Hahn - Director of Communications to Presiding Officer Lindsay
Michael Pitcher - Aide to Presiding Officer Lindsay
Justin Littell - Aide to Legislator D'Amaro
Paul Perillie - Aide to Majority Leader Cooper
Maxvell Rose - Aide to Legislator Gregory
Ben Zwirn - Assistant County Executive
Brendan Chamberlain - County Executive Assistant
Assemblywoman Ginny Fields - New York State Assembly/5th District
Wallace Broege - Director/Suffolk County Historical Society
Debbie Alloncius - Legislative Liaison/AME
Shirley Sessa - John J. Foley Skilled Nursing Facility
Kathleen Embleton - John J. Foley Skilled Nursing Facility
Lou Brousseau - President/Rotary Club of Brentwood.
Ruth Berger - Director/Ombudsman Program for Family Service League
James A. Smith, Sr. - Resident of Bay Shore

MINUTES TAKEN & TRANSCRIBED BY:

Alison Mahoney - Court Stenographer

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Good morning. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the first Public Hearing required in connection with the 2009 Operating Budget.

I would like to welcome you and ask you all to please rise and join the committee in our Pledge of Allegiance led by our Presiding Officer, Legislator Lindsay.

Salutation

Please be seated. Okay, as I said, this is our first Public Hearing for the 2009 Operating Budget. We have several cards that have been submitted, each speaker will be given five minutes. And again, welcome. I'd like to call our first speaker this morning, New York State Assemblywoman Ginny Fields. Good morning.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FIELDS:

Good morning. Thank you. I have to turn this on. Good morning. Thank you for allowing me to come before you today. It's been almost five years since I spoke on a microphone in the Suffolk County Legislature. And I'm going to read this just for brevity to try to keep within my amount of time, and it's a letter addressed to the Ways & Means Committee.

"Dear Legislators, I am testifying today at a Public Hearing regarding the John J. Foley Nursing Center to request that you refrain from selling or closing the facility. My testimony is based on experience, research and facts."

"Let me give you a little background on my history. I served in the Suffolk County Legislature for four years. For two of those years I served as Chair of the Health Committee and spent a great deal of time and attention on the needs of the JF. I toured the facility, announced and unannounced, and discussed it with administration and many others during that time. Prior to being elected in 1999 to the Suffolk County Legislature, I spent 37 years in the medical field working in private practice physicians offices. I was intimately involved with patients and their families in placing men and women in nursing homes; it was difficult then and it's difficult now, in trying to find a clean, well-manned, well-run nursing home that can accommodate patients with difficult diagnoses."

"One very vital lesson I learned in those 37 years was that no matter how good the nursing home is, the patient's family members must visit on a routine basis to make sure that their loved one is being attended to. It is enormously important for family members and friends to be in close proximity to the nursing home."

"In addition, I recently had personal experiences with my mother-in-law and father-in-law who both suffered from Dementia and Alzheimer's. Because of the ineptitude of a nursing home my mother-in-law was in, on two occasions she had to be admitted to the hospital because she was dehydrated and suffering from malnutrition." This was -- when we put her in she was fine, wasn't malnourished, wasn't dehydrated. "This was after we put her in the nursing home, because we were all working and couldn't feed her and couldn't take care of her ourselves. I had to call the New York State Department of Health and the Attorney General to force the nursing home to actually take care of her and then my husband was allowed to be in the facility every night to feed her and make sure her needs were taken care of. If she had been in a nursing home far away from our home, those needs would never have been taken care of."

"In addition, my father-in-law had psychosis and had to be placed in lock own unit. I was unable to place him in any nursing home in Suffolk County, including the VA Nursing Home. My father-in-law fought in the Philippines during World War II. The entire family was saddened that he couldn't be placed in a facility that took care of a soldier who fought for our country. He was placed in a facility in Hempstead. This did not allow anyone in our family the ability to visit more than once a week. Is this what you would want for your loved one? I certainly hope that those of you with parents who are still alive do not have to go through these types of situations."

"The County Executive states that, "Ninety-eight percent of the patients are Medicaid eligible and can be readily absorbed by the 40 plus private facilities in Suffolk or by an entity that buys the facility." However, this is not true. When a patient has a psychological or psychiatric diagnosis, dementia or Alzheimer's and must be in a lockdown unit because of roaming, most of the facilities in Suffolk County do not have the capability of accommodating that patient. Many nursing homes do not take patients with mental illness, dementia or Alzheimer's. In addition, many of the nursing homes in Suffolk County do not admit residents who are on Medicaid or who are younger than 65. The vast majority in the JJF are Medicaid or no source of income."

"The County Executive also states that the JJF is "No longer a place of last resort." Again, this is not true. There are 12 beds for AIDS residents and I've been advised that there are no nursing homes in Suffolk County that are certified to serve this population; the nearest are in Nassau and they don't often have available beds."

"In addition, most patients diagnosed with dementia or Alzheimer's cannot deal with change, they have an extremely difficult time trying to accept change and often times they simply cannot. I urge you to discuss this with the New York State Health Department prior to any arrangements being made to move certain patients to another facility. In some cases, it would not be safe to move certain patients."

In discussing JJF with the Ombudsman who has visited with patients for over five years in the JJF, I've been advised that JJF has some of the sickest and most difficult patients. She advises that she, too, agrees, along with the Long-Term Care Community Coalition" -- and I'm going to attach a letter that I will give to all of you -- "that there will be much difficulty getting patients into other nursing homes since half of the population is under 65, some have spinal cord stroke disorders and many require very long-term care. She believes that some of the patients will not survive the changes. She feels that the Alzheimer's Ward, about 80 plus people, would have great difficulty because most of them are severely affected Alzheimer's patients and any changes is a struggle."

"Many of the patients in JJF have established friendships and engage in daily activities in the facility; these patients won't fit in anywhere else. Recently, I understand that Congressman Bishop has coordinated with Tri-Care to provide our returning veterans who have traumatic brain injury and spinal chord injuries with care in the JJF Nursing Center. How can we turn away veterans returning from Afghanistan or Iraq by saying that we want to close the nursing home because it doesn't make money?"

"This should not be the battleground for a war between unions, taxpayers, Legislators and/or the County Executive. This is about doing the right thing and being there for our taxpayers and families who require our help in their greatest time of need."

"This facility truly is 'a place of last resort' for the most vulnerable of our citizens in Suffolk County. It should be the mission of Suffolk County Government to care for the residents of our population who need us the most and not create a situation that will be sorry we didn't work harder and we didn't work smarter for."

"I hope that you will make decisions that are not based on cold-hearted solutions when we make these tough decisions and that we can all work together to create a blueprint for success rather than failure. If we work hard we can make this facility an efficiently run nursing home that we would be proud to have fought for and won."

And what I'd like to give to you is a copy of a letter from the Long-Term Care Community Coalition who represent about two dozen nursing homes along with the testimony that I just gave to you.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Very good. Assemblywoman, I want to thank you for taking the time out of your busy day and schedule to come down and voice your concerns and opinion on a very pressing topic; I truly

appreciate that as I know my colleagues do as well.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FIELDS:

Thank you very much for allowing me to do so.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

And if you would remain one moment, our Presiding Officer had a quick question or a comment.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Ginny, these times are certainly financially challenging for all layers of government. And I know you guys have a big problem of your own.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FIELDS:

Well, it's your problem, too.

P.O. LINDSAY:

It is our problem, too, and that's where I was going. Do you have any feel where you're going to go?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FIELDS:

Well --

P.O. LINDSAY:

I mean, if we -- we're trying to keep the pieces of Suffolk County government together in a logical way. And you know, I mean, we certainly want to make strategic cuts to try and balance our budget without over-taxing our taxpayers. Do you think we'll see further cuts that will effect the County government when you go back in November?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FIELDS:

Bill, you know me very well, we served together, and you know that I never make a promise I can't keep; I promise you there will be pain, I promise that. There is no money in New York State and it's a very dire, very serious, very bad situation that we're all -- excuse me, I have my morning voice -- that we all need to be extremely concerned about.

We're being called back on November 18th and then we're being called back on December 15th. We normally work from January to June, going to Albany every week and then we're back in our districts from July through December. We've already been called back in August to make several million dollars in cuts, hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts. We are expected, I'm sure, of returning and doing hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts that will trickle -- it won't even trickle down, it will flood down into our municipalities and other layers of government. The Federal Government doesn't help us out as much as we desperately need. I know this year they are talking about increasing the taxes for those who make more than a quarter of a million dollars and I think the Governor at this particular point has had kind of a waiting period for being a new Governor and I'm pretty sure that before December 31st he's going to initiate that tax, simply because there is no money and you have to get it from somewhere. And according to the numbers and the statistics, those who make more than \$250,000 are not paying the same percentage as the middle income and the lower income in their taxes. So we'll probably see that but we will see some cuts and I think maybe some of them are necessary cuts for fat that doesn't really need to be in government. I think we'll all have to make tough decisions.

But in this particular case, in the John J. Foley Nursing Center, I think there are so many things -- and this is my background speaking -- that we can do that would be absolutely efficient and intelligent and making that facility run the best way that it can. We in government have to get rid of that Civil Service mentality that some workers have and we have to market that facility, we have to make sure the beds are always full, we have to continuously strive to make it a better, almost business; it is a business, you have to make it run better and more efficiently.

So if someone were really in charge of that and really had a blueprint for success, as I mentioned in my letter, rather than one for failure, then they would look at the ways that you can increase the revenue, capture revenue and make sure that it's run better and collecting more money. And the veterans situation I think might be a way of doing some of that.

P.O. LINDSAY:

There is no doubt that the management of our nursing home was horrible.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FIELDS:

Yep.

P.O. LINDSAY:

And that's why this Legislature passed a resolution to privatize the management, not the facility. And we're waiting for an RFP to come back, I believe it's this week, with responders to that request, to put a new management team in there with incentives to streamline the process, make it more efficient, fill up the beds, cut costs, do everything that a smart management team is capable of doing, in conjunction with the employees that work in the facility. And I'm hopeful that that will go a long way in turning the corner in making this more -- this facility more fiscally responsible.

But if we do all that and the Medicaid reimbursement rate is cut to the nursing homes, we're dead in the water.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FIELDS:

I totally understand that. I'm really happy to hear that you did put that RFP in, I think that's going to make a big difference. And unfortunately, these kinds of measures should have been done a long time ago.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Absolutely.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FIELDS:

And I blame, you know, administration in the past for not jumping on this problem and just waiting for something really bad to happen, and it has. So it is up to us in government to not react but be proactive, and unfortunately we're in a reactive position but we can become proactive. We can do the things that we're supposed to do and make this situation a much better one for residents and vulnerable people in Suffolk County. So thank you.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FIELDS:

I'll do everything I can, though, in New York State. As you know, I have a loud voice when I need to and I continuously fight for us in Suffolk County and I'll make sure that I fight even harder for us. Thank you.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Thank you.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Assemblywoman, before you go, I just wanted to ask you a quick question. It's really fortunate for us that you came down today because you have served in County government, and also now being in the Assembly, it's a great resource for us here. And I just had a question on my mind.

I also supported, along with the Presiding Officer, the effort to bring in new management and try and turn this facility around. I think it's the right thing to do, to try and reverse the trends that

we've seen from the mismanagement and I completely agree. However, some studies are showing that even with operating at 95% occupancy and at maximum efficiencies that can be achieved, this facility will lose between seven to \$10 million a year. Any -- does that have any effect on your opinion?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FIELDS:

I'm not sure that's accurate. There have been a couple of studies in John J. Foley and I would rather see -- I'd like to go through that, you know, and speak to those consultants. Having done this for 37 years, I don't believe that, I don't believe it at all. And I think that --

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Well, just to give you a little more background, and I don't want to have a debate, but just what I've been told -- and I'm really in a fact-finding process on all of this, so I appreciate you answering my question -- is that it's really about the labor contracts affiliated with the center that make it --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FIELDS:

Yeah, but I'm not sure that's true.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Well --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FIELDS:

I'm not sure that's true.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Okay.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FIELDS:

It's not just the labor contracts.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Well, I've heard that not only from the studies but from --

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FIELDS:

It's pharmaceuticals, it's -- there's a lot of things that I know that the average person wouldn't know. Having been in the Health Committee as chair, having been over there, having spoken with administration then and even recently when they came up to Albany to lobby us and talk to us. I know a lot of things about that nursing home that the average person doesn't know and the consultants didn't even touch, they didn't touch.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Yeah, that's why I'm asking.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FIELDS:

So that's my point. There are a lot of things that I don't agree with that consultant's report, that there are measures and they're big money-saving measures and that needs to be -- and I would tell you that I think an RFP, with the proper administration running that facility that has the background and knows what they're doing I think is going to make us go a long, long way into seeing that nine, seven, five million; I've heard different numbers --

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Right.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FIELDS:

-- and they change depending upon who wants to throw them out there.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Right.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FIELDS:

I think you'll see a big difference.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Well, I'm encouraged by that. Again, having your experience and knowing how the facility runs, I'm encouraged by that. I did support bringing in the management, I do want to try and turn it around. But, you know, sometimes as you point out, you get these numbers thrown at you, you get studies thrown at you that are just showing us that even at 95% occupancy, full reimbursement and efficiencies in place, even with the management, the loss is quite substantial.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FIELDS:

As you know in politics, statistics are generally thrown, depending upon who the party is that's throwing them, to make it look better or make it look worse. And in this situation, I think it really needs to have somebody who's objective looking at it, not paid for by the person who wants to see the crunch and the numbers but done so that it's done like a business.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Sure.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FIELDS:

You know? It's got to have a cash flow, it has to have receivables taken in and it has to look at how you buy and purchase items, how you utilize your facility, how you hire nursing care and not per diem but actually hiring people. Because we went through fights and for four and a half years in Albany for nurses not to have mandatory overtime and that's a problem. When you start throwing a nurse in a situation and have them work 16 hours, there are going to be mistakes, they're going to miss things. You know, having had the experience with my in-laws and with patients in my past, if a person is in a hurry and has 30 patients that they have to take care of and each one of them need to be fed, they're not going to get 30 patients fed in one evening all by themselves. So, you know, there's a problem with employment there, there's a problem with pharmaceuticals, there's a problem with hospitalization when they're taken out and brought back in. There are many, many problems in the facility, even contracts that weren't renewed that when they would send someone out for a mammography and got them there, the facility that received them said, "Oh, you know, that contract from the County expired four months ago. We don't do mammographies any more." So you've paid for that person to be going into an ambulance or a vehicle, driven all the way to a different place, in Stony Brook or wherever, and they didn't even know that the contract ended. So this has been a disgustingly run facility that really needs to get cleaned up, straightened out and moving forward instead of going backwards.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Uh-huh. Great, I really appreciate your help.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FIELDS:

Thank you very much.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FIELDS:

Thanks again for allowing me to speak.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Of course.

Applause

Okay. If you've just joined the committee, we have green cards available; if you'd like to address this Public Hearing this morning, please fill one out. The second request is from Wallace Broege. Good morning, sir.

MR. BROEGE:

Good morning. My name is Wallace Broege, I'm the Director of the Suffolk County Historical Society and I come to speak about the County Executive's recommended level of funding for the Historical Society.

The County Executive's recommended budget calls for funding of \$185,000 for the Historical Society; that will mean about a 34% reduction or the loss of \$95,000 from our operating budget and we'll be \$115,000 below our requested level of funding. If that funding is put in place for us in 2009, the effect on our programs will be nothing short of devastating. It will mean the loss of eight part-time staff members which will really only leave a staff of two full-time people there; we'll have to close the museum three days a week which will mean it will only be open two days a week; we'll close our research library and our weathervane gift shop; we'll eliminate our public relations program. And unfortunately, many of the good programs and initiatives that we've been put in -- been able to put in place over the past two years with the support of the Legislature will be lost.

We're very grateful for the interest that the Legislature has taken in the budget and the Historical Society. The Legislature has always been supportive of us and in the last two years we received two handsome increases which have helped us quite a good deal. It's allowed us -- it's enabled us to concentrate on a very simple three-pronged approach for the Historical Society. We've been able to increase the number of temporary exhibits and programs that we have in place, we've been able to publicize the organization better so that people know who we are and what we are and we've been able to increase the public hours of the institution by getting the museum open five days a week again and the library, soon to be open four days a week. By strengthening the Historical Society, you have made it possible for the Society to build on a very solid foundation of artifacts and documents that have been collected by the organization since 1886.

The material that I've left with you today lists the progress we've made in some of the programs that we've been able to put in place, so I don't need to take your time reading down that list item by item this morning. I urge you to please consider restoring the funds that the County Executive has removed from our budget and set the level of funding for the Historical Society at \$300,000 for 2009.

In closing, I want to thank you for this opportunity and invite you all to visit the museum when you're in Riverhead. I'll answer any questions if you have them and certainly be available to answer questions at any time.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Mr. Broege, thank you very much for coming down and participating in this hearing today. Are there any questions from any member of the panel? If not, thank you again.

MR. BROEGE:

Thank you.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

I appreciate your time. The next request is from Ruth Berger from the Family Service League. Good morning and welcome.

MS. BERGER:

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you. I, too, am here on behalf of the John J. Foley Skilled Care Facility. My name is Ruth Berger, I'm the Director of Family Service

League's Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program. Mandated under the Older Americans Act, we are part of a State Network of Ombudsman programs and we have been in existence here in Suffolk County for 19 years. We are advocates for more than 13,000 residents of Suffolk County's nursing and adult homes and assisted living facilities. We have over 80 volunteers who visit our long-term care facilities each week informing the residents of their rights, helping them to resolve any concerns or problems. We speak for those who cannot speak for themselves.

We've been a presence at John J. Foley for many years when it was still down the road from the old building. It was always a good nursing home, caring for those physically or mentally frail, indigent people in our community who had nowhere else to live. Many are elderly, but we have younger people there also who will be -- who will not be admitted by other facilities. And as you heard from Ginny Fields, Foley is the only nursing home in Suffolk County that has beds for residents with AIDS. Many of these vulnerable residents would find a move elsewhere very difficult, sometimes impossible, and would suffer from what we call "transfer trauma". They would probably decline very rapidly.

Foley has been home to many of these residents for most of their adult lives. Some have advanced dementia. Moving away from family, friends and familiar surroundings would be detrimental to their health. Families are essential stakeholders in the health of all long-term care residents. We witness so often the essential role families play in the well-being of all residents in our County's 42 nursing homes. We know that John J. Foley can become much more efficient in fiscal management with the proper County oversight. Both the interim administrator, and more recently the newly appointed administrator, have begun to make some positive changes such as updating the necessary paper work in order to collect payments for Medicare and Medicaid. Foley's rehab department is being renovated; short-term rehab pays a high reimbursement rate for Medicare. With the updated rehab facility, short-term residents can be admitted bringing in increased revenue.

The whole facility, under its new management, is more open and welcoming. We in the Ombudsman Program would be happy to help in any way that we can to prevent Foley from being closed. Please think of the residents and don't allow it to be closed.

You know, Suffolk County is really a great County. We have among the most beautiful beaches in the world, State Parks, a varied and interesting cultural life, good schools and colleges, including the world-renowned State University at Stony Brook. But what does it say about us if we are not willing to help the frail, elderly and most vulnerable members of our community?

I would like to add that I certainly agree with Assemblywoman Fields that there are many ways to make the facility more manageable fiscally. Thank you.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Thank you very much.

Applause

Ms. Berger, I see that you filled out more than one card.

MS. BERGER:

Oh, maybe somebody else filled one out for me.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Okay, thank you again. We appreciate your comments and I want to say thank you also for all the work to the Family Service League as well, we appreciate everything you do, especially in the Town of Huntington.

MS. BERGER:

Thank you.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Thank you. Okay, the last card I have is a request from Debra Alloncius. Ms Alloncius is the AME Legislative Director, and good morning.

MS. ALLONCIUS:

Good morning, Mr. D'Amaro. Are you head of the Budget Workforce Committee? I know, you know, several of you are on it.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

The -- which committee are you referring to, please?

MS. ALLONCIUS:

I guess the recommended Operating Budget Working Group?

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

The Working Group that is presently working now at looking and examining --

MS. ALLONCIUS:

I don't know if I should call you Chairman or just Legislator D'Amaro.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Oh, no, just call me Lou, that's fine.

MS. ALLONCIUS:

Well, it's a pleasure to work with you, Mr. D'Amaro..

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Same here, of course.

MS. ALLONCIUS;

And I really appreciate all of the kind words that you have had to say, and I certainly appreciate Ginny Fields coming down today to speak with you. Because as AME has said over and over again -- and I'm speaking on behalf of Cheryl Felice and the eighty-five hundred members of AME. We were willing to sit down four and a half years ago, actually five years ago, when Cheryl Felice was asked to participate in a group to find measures that the union would note to make things more productive at Foley. Cheryl absolutely wanted to be part of that; that committee never came to fruition, she never got a call. In five years, that place has just been run into the ground and I have been saying this over and over again to you. The Medicaid applications that were never followed up on. You lost -- you've lost a million dollars out there in past, like, seven years by monies not collected from people who have income coming into the facility. There has been nothing done on the administration's part. We have a whole County Attorney's Office that could have been filing against these people to get that income.

You have -- again and again, I keep telling you, there is no aid and attendance for the veterans out there; that's like twenty-eight hundred -- when I was doing Medicaid eligibility that was a prerequisite; we did not even look at opening up your case until you showed us that you had filed for that, that that income was coming. And at that point it was about twenty-eight hundred dollars a month; that's a lot of money because that income gets turned over, that's cash. Very different from the Medicaid piece, okay.

The Medicare Part B, Part D -- no, not billing. How much money is lost there? The absolute mismanagement, and I say this on the part of the people who are in the facility but also on administration's part, because the place was run into the ground, deliberately run into the ground. I

saw you guys get boondoggled over the Suffolk Health Plan; we weren't losing money. AME did not come forward and put much into -- well, did not have a lot of input into that, although we knew that you were not losing the money, we also have to pick our battles. And knowing that the HMO was a -- how the spin was put on it, it was just an insurance program. You know why it was an insurance program? It was an insurance program to keep those health centers alive and I told you that on more than one occasion. And now we only have five years in which those health facilities will have to be maintained and after that all bets are off.

Suffolk County is written up in text books, you've been told this. The State University of Arizona about the health care system in place. In today's day and age, when all you hear about is the people who don't have health care and here you're being asked by a County Executive to write this out of the budget when, again, what we're providing for is the basic health and safety of the 265 people who are out there and have nobody to turn to but you, nobody at all.

We are saying that this place can be turned around. I have worked my hardest. It is not up to the unions in this County to figure out what's wrong, it's up to the management and the management here did not do their part. It is -- it's been -- it's a gross atrocity what has happened there. And I must say that Cheryl Felice would be here this morning to address you except for the fact that she's attending the 5th year anniversary mass of her grandmother who after painstaking -- after the family painstakingly looked at every nursing home in the area to place this mother who was very active in the community for most of her life, to find a place for her that was safe, and Cheryl kept saying, "You don't have to go further than JJ Foley, just go to JJ Foley." Well, when they went to JJ Foley, they never left. They put her there and JJ Foley kept her clean and in wonderful spirits through the end of her lifetime. And I can't say to you more that the care that is given there is extraordinary, absolutely extraordinary.

I have been through processes because both of my grandmothers spent the remaining years of their lives in a nursing home and they were both fortunate to be in Broadlawn Manor, which at that time was beautifully run. I had an aunt who was on the board there and it didn't -- it wasn't that she was on the board there to take care of my one grandmother, but my other grandmother who had been there prior to Marie Downey being in that home, she was just as well taken care of. That nursing home has gone steadily down hill, all I hear is the worst stories about what's going on there. I worked in the Medicaid Division for 11 years and I can tell you horror stories about the nursing homes; you don't hear one horror story coming out of JJ Foley.

About the worse horror story that I've heard coming out of JJ Foley was what our secretary, Kathy Malloy, told you, that she was sitting there having a soda with a nurse and CNA who were on their break while she was visiting her mother-in-law and about a per diem nurse who came to the table, took a five minute break to the bathroom, came back, head hit the table, then she hit the floor; they had to have her taken out by the cops because she was so stoned on whatever drugs she found in the facility, I assume; but that's a gross assumption on my part. That's the only horror story I've ever heard out of there, with the exception of the mandatory overtime and what you're doing to the staff out there.

The staff out there have diligently tried. And except for the fact that nobody is there watching the store and that's pathetic. There are two branches of this government; if one branch of government did not watch, it's really incumbent upon on the other branch, had you known what was going on there all along, we could have prevented this. Again, I bring you all the way circle back to that agency oversight report. If you had an idea of what was going on, the staffing in the Police Department, in Social Services, in the Health Department, the Health Department is what, it's 18%, you know, down in personnel? All of this makes a difference.

There have been Memorandums of Agreement, there was an MOA years ago where we talked about flexible scheduling and the Legislature has -- seems to think that there are -- the union is going to have to, you know, give up something here. We have come up with ways to keep this place functioning and there have been instances where we've had flexible scheduling and quite a few other

things in place out at JJ Foley, they all have to be done again, they really do. And you know, before our members really have to give up any concessions, let's look at management, get it working right. And we ask the time. We have -- I worked very hard to get that Tri-Care Contract, I got your Tri-Care Contract in 45 days, what takes four to six months to get, because they were so gung-ho on having our veterans here. We're going to turn against veterans now? Two hundred and sixty-five infirmed people in a nursing home and now we're not going to give veterans the ability to -- it's sad. I came up with a funding source.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Well, yeah.

MS. ALLONCIUS:

I don't know how much more we could possibly do, but we will work with you a hundred percent of the way and do what we need to do to make this place an asset, because that's what it is, it's an asset of the taxpayers of Suffolk County; let's not forget that.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

I appreciate very much your words today as well as President Felice and the members of AME. And you're certainly coming from the right direction, you're concerned about keeping the facility available to the residents of this County that can offer services that perhaps are not available, readily available --

MS. ALLONCIUS:

Absolutely.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

-- anywhere else close to home.

MS. ALLONCIUS:

Absolutely.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

You're talking about caring for people who truly need the care, many of whom may be at the tail end of even being with us, and these are all positive things. And I just want to also acknowledge that in all of my discussions with you and with AME and with Cheryl Felice, you have always been coming from the right direction on this issue and I appreciate that very much.

MS. ALLONCIUS:

And I thank you for those kind words and I wish you all the best of luck. I know it's a tough budget. We're not -- our heads are not buried in the sand.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Sure.

MS. ALLONCIUS:

We know what's going on.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Well --

MS. ALLONCIUS:

Because we do suffer from the loss of positions and the revenue up at AME. We're not looking for the revenue from members, but we're saying that we understand because we've had to trim and do -- and live within our budget.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Right. And we need the input and we do have to at the end of the day govern and make decisions and set priorities.

MS. ALLONCIUS:

Absolutely.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

But in order to do that we need all the facts, we need all of the input so that we can at least make what we feel is the best decision knowing the best of all the circumstances.

MS. ALLONCIUS:

That I can agree with, but I don't know how hypothetically you can look at the numbers. Because you're looking at one set of numbers that's been given to you by the County Exec --

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Well, we have several sets of numbers these days and that's --

MS. ALLONCIUS:

Okay. Okay, but they're superfluous.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

We're sifting through that, yeah. We're looking at all of that. You know, I did participate in a meeting yesterday and hearing from the other side on this issue because I -- it's not an indication of ultimately what I think we should do, I'm still in my fact-finding process. However, I think it's important to hear all sides and then, of course, come to a decision.

MS. ALLONCIUS:

And we offer our time and effort to you in your fact-finding process. Please, our door is open. We will do whatever we can, Legislator D'Amaro, and I think you well know that.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Absolutely.

MS. ALLONCIUS:

Thank you.

ACTING CHAIRMAN D'AMARO:

Thank you.

Applause

Okay. That concludes the speakers who have filled out a card. Is there anyone here who has not filled out a card and would like to address this Public Hearing this morning? Okay, if not, we will consider the Public Hearing closed. I thank everyone for coming down and participating today. Thank you.

(*The hearing was adjourned at 10:51 AM*)