

PUBLIC HEARING

October 1, 2013 - 9 AM

A Public Hearing on the 2014 Operating Budget
was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium
Of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building,
725 Veterans Memorial Highway,
Smithtown, New York

Present:

Legislator Al Krupski - Acting Chair/District Office #1
Legislator Wayne Horsley Deputy Presiding Officer/District Office #14
Legislator Tom Barraga - District Office #11
Debbie Harris - Aide to Legislator Stern
Kevin McEvaddy - AME/Legislative Aide
Gregory Noone Thursday's Child

Minutes Taken by:

Alison Mahoney - Court Reporter

Minutes Transcribed by:

Denise Weaver - Legislative Aide

(*The public hearing was called to order at 9:08 A.M. *)

ACTING CHAIRMAN KRUPSKI:

Please stand for the Pledge.

SALUTATION

Good morning. I'd like to welcome everyone here for the public hearing of the Budget and Finance Committee. I have one card here for comment. Gregory Noone, would you like to speak?

MR. NOONE:

Thank you.

D.P.O. HORSLEY:

Hang on.

ACTING CHAIRMAN KRUPSKI:

Yes, this is the -- this is a public hearing for the Operating Budget, so you could make any comments about the Operating Budget. Thank you.

MR. NOONE:

Yes.

D.P.O. HORSLEY:

It's just not Budget.

MR. NOONE:

Right. Do I turn this on or is this on already?

MS. MAHONEY:

You're good.

MR. NOONE:

Oh, good? Okay.

D.P.O. HORSLEY:

Cranking up for the day.

MR. NOONE:

Okay. Good morning, friends. The New York State Department of Health website states: *"Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome is a late-stage of HIV disease. Medications can help people living with HIV and AIDS live longer, healthier lives. Some people have lived for more than 20 years and have taken medicines for more than ten years. Not everyone's disease progresses or responds to medications in the same way. AIDS has serious health consequences, it can interfere with quality of life and there is no cure,"* unquote.

The most recent survey data tells us that nearly 3,000 people in Suffolk County are living with HIV and AIDS. I am here this morning to plead with the Legislature to restore funding to Thursday's Child of Long Island. I am well aware that the County Executive has difficult choices to make, and budgeting the taxpayers' hard-earned dollars is not an easy process. But I'm here to tell you that Thursday's Child AIDS Services Access Program has been an unqualified success. In fact, we have doubled the County's investment in our agency and brought in over \$100,000 in Federal funding to provide direct services to Suffolk County residents.

D.P.O. HORSLEY:

That's great.

MR. NOONE:

Continued Federal assistance is dependent upon your help.

Since 1989, the mission of Thursday's Child is to develop, to coordinate and to provide services to people living with HIV and AIDS. Two dozen families have called our Independent, Supportive Housing Program home since 1992. Over 300 families are served annually at our office; various services as emergency food and financial assistance, to gifts for the children during the holidays. We are a small, but effective agency that has maintained its non-profit status for 22 years. And for the past five years, we have met or exceeded our service goals set out each year on behalf of the Suffolk County Department of Health.

Our newest program, an HIV positive early intervention service, is showing success. We have identified over a dozen Suffolk County residents diagnosed HIV positive; they have been linked to live-saving medical care, have been assisted to navigate the complex medical and social services systems; they have been provided basic HIV facts and literacy; we have assisted in obtaining social services, health insurance, housing, transportation. This, my friends, is part of the solution to the AIDS crisis.

Our Early Intervention Service is crucial. We are partnering with Suffolk County hospitals, clinics and local doctor's offices because HIV testing must be offered by law to all persons between the ages of 13 and 64 at all key points of entry in medical care.

The goals of early intervention are clear and the evidence is overwhelming: HIV infection rates remain stubbornly high due to those who are unaware of their HIV status. Recent studies show that when a person knows his or her status and gets treated, HIV infection rates drop by over 95%. Now is the very time to put more resources into this public health threat, not end them.

Thursday's Child humbly requests that you allow us to continue to serve our neighbors in need. We ask that you restore funding for our AIDS Services Access Program. We ask on behalf of the nearly 3,000 Suffolk County families who are affected by this health crisis and who do not have the ability to speak for themselves. So many continue to live in the long shadows of fear, stigma, intolerance and shame, but there is little to be shameful of. HIV is a medical condition that is life threatening and of which there is no cure.

Over 80% of our clients live with fixed incomes. Many do not have adequate shelter; many are food insecure; many need guidance as they feel overwhelmed when newly diagnosed.

And many have gone on to live productive, healthy lives. Our tales are cautionary, for sure, but many of those offered a caring, compassionate hand at Thursday's Child have returned to health. Many have returned to a clean and sober life; many have returned to school, and most proudly, many of those whom we have helped have returned to work and self-sufficiency.

Thursday's Child is much more than an information and referral agency, although those are very, very important. We toil behind the scenes to offer dignity and hope. Thursday's Child remains unique; it is the only non-profit charity on all of Long Island that remains dedicated to serving this targeted population. Please allow us to do what we do best, serve our neighbors in need and help bring about an end to the AIDS crisis.

I beg of you to please restore Thursday's Child funding in the 2014 budget. Thank you.

ACTING CHAIRMAN KRUPSKI:

Thank you. Any questions?

D.P.O. HORSLEY:

Yeah, I have a quick question, Greg. Good morning. This is like déjà vu all over again, huh? You were here last year pretty much saying the same thing. We -- from the Executive's budget you were whited out; is that --

MR. NOONE:

I was very disappointed two Fridays ago, yes, because we've been making very good inroads with the County Executive's Office. We've been very cooperative with the Suffolk County Department of Health Services and we have made multiple outreaches. In fact, in April, this past spring, I submitted our 2014 budget to the County Exec's Office as well as an expanded contract narrative of increasing our services that we would offer to the County residents. So I was probably the most shocked when I saw that we were literally whited out, zeroed out.

D.P.O. HORSLEY:

What was provided last year from the County?

MR. NOONE:

One hundred thousand.

D.P.O. HORSLEY:

That's what I thought.

MR. NOONE:

We have been -- the inroads we've been making have been extraordinarily positive. In fact, that the United Way of Long Island, the Nassau-Suffolk HIV Services Planning Council, thought that we did such a good job providing an early intervention service that they actually increased the priority level so that when it comes time to write the budget for the Federal funding to our region under the Ryan White Act, they actually increased our priority to number two. Now, we can't tell what's going to happen with what's going on in D.C. these days, but the fact remains that --

D.P.O. HORSLEY:

No one can.

MR. NOONE:

-- we can anticipate an increase in Federal funding if we are granted another year.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Good morning. The 100,000; what percentage is that of your overall budget when you take into consideration, you know, Federal funding and other sources?

MR. NOONE:

That's about 40%.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Forty percent.

MR. NOONE:

Yes, sir.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Now, this has gone on for a number of years in terms of Executive budgets where you were not included; right?

MR. NOONE:

Yes.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Because I remember you coming in. That precedes the current administration, too, under the old administration, they also had "*whited you out*" as they say?

MR. NOONE:

Yes. It started -- the actual history goes back to actually where former County Executive Levy was actually the first one to insert us in his budget, I believe, in 2007.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Did he take you out at some point, too?

MR. NOONE:

Toward the end of his administration, yes.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Okay. Now, what is the rationale -- have you ever had a sense of why they're doing that? Cause, you know, we have these -- these hearings, you've shown up several times and you've been in my office several times, and yet you seem to have a good relationship with the Executive Branch but, in the end they cut you out.

MR. NOONE:

I --

LEG. BARRAGA:

Any idea why?

MR. NOONE:

I can only imagine it is because the population that we serve is not -- well, bluntly, your average voter. They don't necessarily have the ability to speak for themselves, they're often poor, they're often transient and inappropriately housed. So they don't necessarily -- these are people who are mostly living in the shadows. They don't have a voice. We are the voice for this population.

So, I believe, since we're not in the headlines of Newsday on a regular basis and since there aren't people clamoring in the streets, I believe that if all funding is lost and all programs are cut, I believe there will be a spike in not only hospitalizations, deaths, crime, all these things that we do behind the scenes, so I believe it's a truly a matter of that we just don't have the people to speak up on behalf of themselves.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Okay. All right, thank you very much. And we'll see how the process goes forward as the Legislature takes a review of the budget.

MR. NOONE:

And I'll be happy to meet again with each of you personally and show you what we do and how we do and the amazing amount of services done with a very little bit amount of money.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Because in past years the Legislature's been the one to reinsert you in the budget.

MR. NOONE:

Yes, and that has its own political implications, I'm sure.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Thank you.

D.P.O. HORSLEY:

What did he mean by that.

ACTING CHAIRMAN KRUPSKI:

Well, because if someone takes it out and someone puts it back in, who's responsible for adding to the budget?

D.P.O. HORSLEY:

Good point.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Sort of like selling wine in farm stands.

*(*Laughter*)*

ACTING CHAIRMAN KRUPSKI:

Not that simple. Thank you.

MR. NOONE:

But suffice to say, we're the good guys and we're doing our best on behalf of the County, and thank you for all your past support.

ACTING CHAIRMAN KRUPSKI:

And we look forward to seeing you next week.

MR. NOONE:

Thank you.

ACTING CHAIRMAN KRUPSKI:

Thank you.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Is that it.

ACTING CHAIRMAN KRUPSKI:

You want to just wait?

LEG. BARRAGA:

Close it.

D.P.O. HORSLEY:

Then you go to Budget and Finance.

ACTING CHAIRMAN KRUPSKI:

Is there anyone else who would like to make a comment? This is your last chance, gentlemen.

Do I have a motion to close the hearing?

LEG. BARRAGA:

Motion.

D.P.O. HORSLEY:

Second.

MS. HARRIS:

Shouldn't it be recessed? There's public hearing on the Operating Budget in Riverhead.

D.P.O. HORSLEY:

Oh, that's a good point.

ACTING CHAIRMAN KRUPSKI:

Thank you.

D.P.O. HORSLEY:

Yeah, good point. Recess.

ACTING CHAIRMAN KRUPSKI:

Is there a second on the recess?

D.P.O. HORSLEY:

Second on the recess.

ACTING CHAIRMAN KRUPSKI:

All right. All in favor? Recessed.

*(*The public hearing was recessed at 9:20 A.M. *)*