

**HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH COMMITTEE  
MINUTES**

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2021  
4:00 P.M.**

PRESENT: James D. O'Donnell, Chairman  
Michael Amo, Mike Anagnostakis, Janet Sutherland, Kevindaryán Luján,  
Laurie R. Tautel, Peter V. Tuohy

ALSO

PRESENT: L. Stephen Brescia, Chairman  
Katie Bonelli, Majority Leader  
Michael D. Paduch, Minority Leader  
Leigh J. Benton, Legislator  
Barry J. Cheney, Legislator  
Thomas J. Faggione, Legislator  
Kevin W. Hines, Legislator  
Paul Ruskiewicz, Legislator  
John S. Vero, Legislator  
Betsy N. Abraham, Legislative Counsel  
Harold J. Porr, III, Deputy County Executive  
Dan Bloomer, Director, Operations and Cost Control  
Darcie Miller, Commissioner of Social Services and Mental Health  
Christopher Ericson, Deputy Commissioner of Health  
Laurence LaDue, Commissioner, Valley View Center  
Donna Strecker, Director of Finance, Valley View Center  
Deborah Slesinski, Budget Director

Mr. O'Donnell opened the committee meeting at 4:15 p.m. and asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. All committee members were present with the exception of Legislator Luján who arrived at 4:26 p.m.

On the agenda was a Department Update from Darcie Miller, Commissioner of Social Services and Mental Health.

Ms. Miller addressed the committee stating that New York State completed a survey that showed that 37% of adults show poor mental health and 49% of young adults between the ages of 18 and 34 have reported poor mental health and as a result they need to spread the message on how to connect to services and advocating the 3-1-1 call center. The Media Kit for Project Hope was emailed to legislators and Orange County is one of 10 counties across the state who are eligible based on COVID-19 cases for implementation of Project Hope, a program of disaster mental health services funded through the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), and jointly overseen by Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) and the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS). **The purpose** of the crisis counseling program is to help disaster victims recognize that, in most cases, their emotional reactions are normal and to develop coping skills that would allow them to resume their pre-disaster level of functioning and equilibrium. The Crisis Counseling Program (CCP) supports short-term interventions with individuals and groups experiencing psychological sequelae to large scale disasters. The interventions involved in the counseling goals are assisting disaster survivors in understanding their current situation and

reactions, mitigating additional stress, assisting survivors in reviewing their options, promoting the use of or development of coping strategies, providing emotional support, encouraging linkages with other individuals/agencies who may help survivors recover to their pre-disaster level of functioning. During the Super Bowl, New York State aired a commercial on the Crisis Counseling Program (CCP) between the third and fourth quarter and received 1200 hits as a result. In addition, they recently learned that 75% of the funds from the 2020 New York State 20% withhold would be reinstate by the end of March 2021. However, they are still calling for a 5% reduction across all services and while 5% is less than the 20% withholding it is still too much when so many people still have unmet needs in their communities.

Ms. Sutherland moved request to accept and appropriate, into the operating budget, additional funds (unobligated funds) from the New York State Department of Health for the Public Health Emergency Preparedness grant for the period of 9/1/2020 – 8/31/2021 to be used for the Opioid crisis, \$31,578.00, seconded by Ms. Tautel.

Mr. Ericson explained that the funds would be used primarily for the mental health units peer counselor's salary and fringe benefits cost.

Motion carried. All in favor.

On the agenda was a Department Update from Christopher Ericson, Deputy Commissioner of Health.

Mr. Ericson addressed the committee stating that the Orange County Department of Health has been fully active in its response to COVID-19 and they continue to support two separate missions. First is the COVID-19 Case Investigations which consists of reviewing positive test results and preparing the information for contact tracing, developing, and implementing quarantine/isolation orders and public health notifications when "large scale" potential exposures have been identified. The number of positive COVID-19 cases in the county are starting to trend downward and their rolling ten-day average and last Wednesday they were at 159.6 cases per day and the week before that they were at 222. As of today, Orange County has 34,287 positive COVID-19 cases and 705 deaths. Orange County has approximately one hundred New York State virtual case investigators that are following up on cases they were unable to get to, seven New York State contractors working at the government center doing data entry and seven contracted New York State employees working at the Emergency Services Center conducting case investigations. They have hired two new nurses which are COVID-19 funded positions, they are reviewing applications for an epidemiologist and two state funded school specialist positions that will look at case positives in the school systems. The second is Vaccination Implementation: tracking vaccine distribution throughout the county, helping residents determine where they can get vaccinated and implementing department point of distribution (POD). The Health Department's Call Center continues to receive large volumes of calls from county residents looking for more information. In addition, county residents continue to be frustrated with allocation of vaccine to the county, confusion as to if they are eligible, difficulty registering and senior citizens who are unable to navigate a webpage and/or they don't have a computer. The county has set up an online vaccination information request form that residents can

use to give their contact information in order to receive information. He read the following from the form: "The purpose of this form is to gather contact information for individuals wishing to receive the **COVID-19 vaccine as it becomes available**. Filling out this form does not guarantee someone will receive vaccine." While it is a list that keeps going and they do draw from that list when they know they have vaccine available; however, that does not guarantee that a person will be vaccinated because they have signed up for information. He noted that several legislators have come to the Health Department's point of distribution (POD) at 23 Hatfield Lane in Goshen which has proven to be very successful as they typically distribute vaccine twice a week and have given thousands of doses of vaccine.

Ms. Tautel commented that she spoke with Mr. Ericson last week about the ongoing list and he stated that the link was solely for information only but has that changed and it is now for vaccines. Mr. Ericson replied that it is a vaccine information request form and is still labeled that way on the county website. They did not want people signing up on this list thinking that because they did, they would be vaccinated; however, it has been used it to call people to be vaccinated. When they spoke about this two weeks ago the intent was not to create a list for people to be vaccinated but it has evolved into that. They still want people to be proactive and to try and find vaccine wherever they can and to not solely depend on the website. When this was created it was for seniors that did not have the ability to go on a computer and/or navigate through all the confusing systems put in place by New York State.

Ms. Tautel expressed her displeasure that vaccine is being distributed without the Orange County Health Department's knowledge and that is shameful.

Ms. Tautel asked if point of distribution (POD) were being considered in rural areas. Mr. Ericson replied that the popup location at the Armory in Newburgh was done by New York State. Currently Orange County has the capacity to do the one large location as it is the most effective and efficient way to get as much vaccine out as possible. However, as this continues to evolve and more distribution is received, they will look to modify how they are distributing the vaccine.

Mr. Tuohy asked for clarification that Orange County is only handling the Orange County list and not the lists at Walgreens and/or CVS. Mr. Ericson replied yes.

Mr. Tuohy asked for the combined number of deaths in Orange County for nursing homes, assisted living and adult care facilities. Mr. Ericson replied that he does not have that breakdown, but he will gather that information for the committee.

Ms. Sutherland asked if there would be a two week pause after school's spring break. Mr. Ericson replied that he has not heard that the school districts had planned to do so.

Ms. Sutherland asked if that guidance would come from the Orange County Health Department. Mr. Ericson replied that it could; however, they have given a lot of the authority over to the school districts so they can adjust things as needed and follow the state guidance.

Ms. Sutherland asked for clarification because at a previous meeting Dr. Gelman indicated that those decisions were coming from New York State. Mr. Ericson replied that as it stands right now it is at the discretion of the school district.

Mr. Luján expressed concerns on distribution and based on the COVID-19 tracker the towns of New Windsor and Newburgh and the city of Newburgh have seen some of the highest COVID-19 cases. If they look at the current map, the Towns of Montgomery, New Windsor, Newburgh and city of Newburgh are all in red and he finds it troubling that they have not created a site in that region of the county. The city of Newburgh has led with the highest number of COVID-19 cases throughout most of the pandemic and COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted communities of color like the city of Newburgh.

Mr. Luján asked if they were planning a second point of distribution (POD) for that region as there are thousands in his district that will not make it to Goshen and to think they would be troubling. In his opinion, there is no reason that people should have to travel to Goshen as there should be points of distribution (POD's) throughout the county. He has spoken to Dr. Gelman about his concerns and she mentioned mobile sites; however, he has not heard anything further on that. He and his constituents have been very patient and while this is not necessarily under the county's control, they expected hundreds of vaccines at the Newburgh Armory but at the last minute were only allotted a few hundred. He understands they do not have control over the state-run vaccine sites; however, for the time being the county-run vaccine sites should be going to the highly impacted districts including their seniors and those at high-risk and to reduce the impact in those areas.

Mr. O'Donnell commented that the Newburgh Armory gave out 250 vaccines which was a very small amount for a city the size of Newburgh and the severity of the problem there. He would suggest that Dr. Gelman put pressure on the state to get more vaccines for that area.

Mr. O'Donnell stated that it has been 38 days since the new administration took office and have they heard anything from Washington D.C. that could help them. Mr. Ericson replied that he has not heard anything directly on changes happening in the county, but it seems that vaccine production will be increased.

Mr. O'Donnell asked for clarification on the process for school districts. Mr. Ericson replied that Health Department has instructed school districts to follow the New York State regulations that have been put into place and they would not necessarily go above and beyond what the state regulations are; however, Commissioner Gelman can issue commissioner's orders if there is a public health emergency and/or something that is dangerous. But they are doing nothing more than what is being presented at the state level and that directive was supplied to the school district as far as following that and staying opened or closed.

Mr. O'Donnell commented that there is a huge difference between requirements and recommendations. What has happened with the school districts is that they have been told to follow the requirements and they will be fine; however, they get a letter attached stating that it is recommended they do not follow it. The school districts and their attorneys will not go against Orange County Commissioner of Health so their commissioner must decide whether she will abide by the requirements of New York State or go above and beyond what is required. School Districts are frustrated, and they will not do anything when the Orange County Commissioner of Health is recommending not to do something when the state is saying they can. He would like to know from Dr. Gelman what the difference is between the requirements and recommendations. He is amazed that some catholic grammar schools have been open since September and could they look into those schools to see if there have been any issues with COVID-19 positive cases because the parents in the schools that have been closed are at their limit. Mr. Ericson replied that he would.

Mr. O'Donnell asked why at various airports across the state the National Guard is having travelers fill out the travel form, but Stewart Airport is not. Mr. Ericson replied that Stewart Airport is run by the Port Authority, so he was not aware of what was happening at the airport and/or what the airline policies are.

Mr. O'Donnell asked if they anticipate all schools reopening. That poor child in the city of Newburgh could still be alive if schools had been opened. Child abuse cases being reported to the Department of Social Services are down by one-third and those numbers would not be down if schools were open. What recommendations will the health department be putting out with respect to the schools in Orange County. Mr. Ericson replied that trends are currently good, and they are seeing positivity rates decrease throughout the county and that is what they want to see, and they all want to see schools fully reopen and kids back in school. As they get through winter and come into nicer weather the virus may not be as strong; however, they have seen some increases just due to Super Bowl Sunday, so the risk is still there. They are continuing to watch this, and they want schools to open and for people to get back to their activities and for things to go back to normal and they are headed in that direction.

Mr. O'Donnell asked if they use specific data with respect to school openings. Mr. Ericson replied that there is some guidance and numbers recommended by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) that was released today, and he will get that information to committee members.

Mr. O'Donnell asked for the logic behind restaurant patrons removing their masks and servers being required to keep their mask on at all times. Mr. Ericson replied that it was a recommendation from the New York State Department of Health, not the Orange County Health Department. However, if two people come to the restaurant together and are friends or family that person who is serving them is not part of that community which could result in exposure.

Mr. O'Donnell asked for an update on weddings and/or large functions. Mr. Ericson replied that the capacity was still at 50%; however, that is still evolving.

Mr. O'Donnell asked if the Orange County Health Department was letting those functions abide by New York State and Center for Disease Control (CDC) requirements and/or would the Orange County Department of Health be putting out their recommendations also. Mr. Ericson replied that they do not have anything above and beyond what New York State recommends. They are doing more with food services permits for outdoor events because they must submit a plan from the template on the New York State site which details how they will remain safe to the Orange County Health Department and they must keep that on file while the event is being held.

Mr. O'Donnell asked about tax preparers. Mr. Ericson replied that they do not have any local rule on that issue. They have seen some complaints come through the pause network, but they do not have any particular set of rules on that issue.

Mr. O'Donnell commented that Town of Goshen Board Member George Lyons has received numerous complaints from the Goshen Senior Center. AARP and other groups volunteer their services to seniors around the county, but the Goshen Senior Center was told that the seniors cannot go into the senior center to meet face to face with tax preparers even with sufficient spacing and masks. They can submit their paperwork with the tax preparer delivering their paperwork to

their residence when it has been completed. He has been told that seniors centers in Montgomery, Middletown and Monroe are allowing seniors into their senior centers. He suggested he speak to Mr. Lyons about this issue as he is sure that people are allowed to meet with their tax preparer in person.

Mr. O'Donnell asked if a certain number and/or data would be needed to allow visitation at nursing homes. Would it be based on the number of staff that has been vaccinated and the number of residents that are vaccinated how would it be determined. Mr. Ericson replied that one of the challenges is that vaccinations are not required and/or mandated and nursing homes and adult group homes are facing that challenge. They recently discussed educating the staff on the vaccine in order to address their concerns and to answer their questions.

Mr. O'Donnell asked if all residents and staff were vaccinated would they allow visitors. Mr. Ericson replied that it would seem logical and right; however, he is not a clinician.

Mr. O'Donnell asked if Mr. Ericson heard that Governor Cuomo was looking at possibly having one nursing home for COVID-19 positive cases only. Mr. Ericson replied no.

Mr. O'Donnell asked that Mr. Ericson look into it because the Parry Building is sitting there empty and they have the capability of separating that building from the rest of the buildings at Valley View. If it was done nine or ten months ago there would have been a good chance that FEMA would have paid for those repairs.

Mr. O'Donnell asked about wearing masks while participating in school sports including Orange County Community College and was that a recommendation by the Orange County Health Department. Mr. Ericson replied no, most recommendations for high school sports come from New York State and they have a well detailed and thought-out plan with respect to each sport including high-risk contact sports versus low-risk sports.

Mr. O'Donnell asked for the population percentage of vaccinations in Orange County. Mr. Ericson replied that the percentage is low based on the number of residents in the county as they have vaccinated less than 10,000 people.

Mr. O'Donnell asked if the county received any of the Johnson and Johnson one shot vaccine. Mr. Ericson replied no, and he was unsure as to when they would receive it. They are still administering Moderna two shot vaccine and they are scheduled for Tuesdays (2<sup>nd</sup> dose) and Thursdays for (1<sup>st</sup> dose) with possibly over 1000 shots a day.

Mr. O'Donnell asked if any discussion were held on employees being mandated to receive the vaccine. Mr. Ericson replied no unless it becomes a state mandate.

Mr. O'Donnell asked if New York State was discussing that mandate. Mr. Ericson replied that they probably are, however, he has not been included.

Ms. Sutherland asked about the tracking that was conducted after the Super Bowl and how the county planned to track any potential uptick of COVID-19 cases after the school's winter break because people will be traveling and sitting around their homes after doing so for the last eleven months. If they are tracking large gatherings, then they should also be tracking times like this. Currently a petition is being circulated to get children back in school five days a week and while

she understands and respects the parent's point of view, the educator's point of view, and as parent and educator she sees both sides. At some point something must be shared from the county on how they will address this because she is concerned that if there is an uptick after the winter break how will it be handled and then for spring break. Mr. Ericson replied that anytime a positive case comes into the Health Department they follow up on it and that does not stop, and these are tracked through the case investigations. When they find one positive case and/or a group of positive cases such as a college or community they look at where those individuals were on the same day.

Ms. Sutherland stated that with all due respect her family has been exposed to COVID-19 four times in the last three months and she is yet to receive a phone call so this is a struggle for her.

Mr. Ericson replied that he believes she did not receive a phone call because it is nearly impossible when they are receiving 400 cases a day and that is why New York State is now assisting them with case investigations.

Ms. Sutherland reiterated that planning needs to be put into place with regard to spring break as it is of great concern to educators and parents.

Ms. Tautel addressed Mr. O'Donnell's question on restaurant servers and patrons and masks. Patrons are able to remove their masks because of the six-foot distance between tables but if they move from their table, they must wear their mask. However, servers are going from person to person so a mask must be worn in order to protect themselves from contracting COVID-19.

Mr. O'Donnell stated that he would appreciate Mr. Ericson getting the answers to their questions back to them as soon as possible.

On the agenda was the monthly report on Valley View.

Ms. Strecker presented the committee with the updated December 2020 financials. IGT funding remains at \$5.3 million and they are expecting an addition payment that would eventually be booked to December 2020 and emergency disaster assistance was at \$2.5 million and other revenues were at \$42 million. On the personal service side, employee benefits at \$23 million, equipment at \$215,000, contractual at \$12 million, employee benefits at \$66.6 million; however, yearend entries for post-retirement benefits and pension obligation have not posted.

Ms. Strecker explained that for January 2021, they budgeted \$7.5 million in IGT funding and \$6.5 million surplus because they had to reduce their occupancy based on COVID-19 with occupancy budgeted at 90% with these funds being used to offset the difference between revenue and expense. On the personal services side, personal services were at \$1.7 million and employee benefits at \$1.1 million.

On the agenda was a Department Update from Laurence LaDue, Commissioner of Valley View.

Mr. LaDue addressed the committee stating that Valley View's census as of today was 71%. They have no COVID-19 positive residents and currently 11 staff members have either tested positive and/or are out of work because they were exposed to a COVID-19 positive person outside of work. Valley View had COVID-19 vaccine clinics on January 25<sup>th</sup> and January 27<sup>th</sup> with 196 residents having received both doses and 32 residents receiving their first dose for a total of 228 residents with 23 residents declining. They have had 138 staff members receive both doses and 53 receiving their first dose for a total of 191 with 144 staff members declining. Valley View is not unique in dealing with staff declining the vaccine and it is unfortunately an issue amongst healthcare providers in not only New York State but across the country as they are skeptical and do not trust it and it is not mandated that they be vaccinated. They are working with the Orange County Department of Health on educational training with respect to the vaccine and those that have refused. February 19<sup>th</sup> will be their last scheduled COVID-19 vaccine clinic for second doses only with no additional clinics scheduled after February 19<sup>th</sup>. Staff have been instructed to utilize Orange County's COVID-19 vaccine signup if they are interested. They continue to test staff twice a week for COVID-19. Family in-person visitation is still prohibited at this time with residents communicating with family members via window visits, phone calls and Facetime calls. Dr. Gelman will be conducting a call with nursing homes and assisted living facilities in Orange County with regard to updates. They are working on upgrades to their Kronos system for payroll. They are also starting to work on installation of Meal Tracker and new accounts receivable software that will put their Electronic Medical Record, dietary software and finance software all on one platform instead of multiple separate systems.

Ms. Sutherland asked if staff members provided a reason for refusing to be vaccinated. Mr. LaDue replied no, but it could be for various reasons such as: having tested positive for COVID-19, not trusting the vaccine or having a preexisting condition. However, they are hopeful that the educational component could change some of their minds.

The meeting adjourned at 5:16 p.m.