

**HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
MINUTES
(REMOTELY)**

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2021
3:30 P.M.**

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

ALSO

PRESENT: L. Stephen Brescia, Chairman
Katie Bonelli, Majority Leader
Leigh J. Benton, Legislator
Barry J. Cheney, Legislator
Thomas J. Faggione, Legislator
Kevin W. Hines, Legislator
Joseph J. Minuta, Legislator
John S. Vero, Legislator
Harold J. Porr, III, Deputy County Executive
Dan Bloomer, Director, Operations and Cost Control
Sharon Worthy-Spiegl, Deputy County Attorney
Darcie Miller, Commissioner of Social Services and Mental Health
Todd Craner, Fiscal Director, Department of Social Services
Ann Marie Maglione, Director, Office for the Aging
Gretchen Riordan, Budget Analyst

Mr. Sassi opened the committee meeting at 3:33 p.m. and asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. All committee members were present.

Mr. O'Donnell moved request to accept inter-municipal agreements between the County of Orange and the Town of Blooming Grove and the Town of Warwick to operate the Senior Dining Program on behalf of the Office for the Aging within their respective areas. The term of each of these agreements is January 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021, seconded by Ms. Sutherland.

Ms. Maglione explained that that is the annual renewal of the municipal agreements for the Towns of Blooming Grove and Warwick. In addition, there are some sites that are on pause because the senior centers are not open. The Town of Blooming Grove coordinates the home delivered meal program in that area and with the legislatures approval they will receive \$30,000.00. The Town of Warwick would receive \$18,000.00 for the driver who delivers the home delivered meals.

Mr. Sassi asked for the number of agreements in Orange County. Ms. Maglione replied that they have seven congregate sites in Montgomery, Cornwall, Highland Falls, Blooming Grove, Warwick, Middletown and Kiryas Joel with Kiryas Joel providing meals and being compensated. However, Highland Falls, Middletown, Cornwall and Montgomery are on pause.

Motion carried. All in favor.

Chairman Brescia commended Ms. Maglione and her staff for handling an abundance of vaccine related questions.

Ms. Maglione thanked Chairman Brescia and explained that they have been slammed with staff coming in on Saturday to answer phones only to come in on Tuesday to 150 voicemails.

Ms. Tautel echoed the praise to Ms. Maglione and her staff with respect to the to the vaccination list they are complying on top of all the other work they do.

Ms. Maglione added that the system is very IT related with so many seniors not having the internet and/or access to a computer or cellphone. When people register, they must either put a cell phone number down and receive a text message or an email address and if you do not have that information you cannot move forward. Her office has been using their work cell phones for those without cell phones and emails to assist them as it is a very time-consuming process.

Mr. Tuohy asked if they were making appointments for these individuals. He has heard from many of constituents that they cannot make an appointment and/or they have been cancelled due to lack of vaccine. Ms. Maglione replied that they are taking their information and empathizing with them. Many think that once they get the vaccine, they can start their life again because they have not seen their loved ones. They are putting these individuals on a list and as soon as an opening comes through, they will let them know. They were able to get approximately 50 people on the list today for the clinic that will be held on Thursday. They are doing the most vulnerable which are the ones with no support, don't have computer access or transportation that they will provide. The currently have about 1000 people on the waitlist and hopefully more will come off next week and as time goes by it will get better. They are basically telling them to hang in there and they will be helped as soon as possible.

Mr. Tuohy asked if those 50 people would be vaccinated this Thursday and were there only 50 tests available. Ms. Maglione replied that there were more than the 50 vaccines available; however, the process to register takes about 20 to 25 minutes as they must ask various medical and personal questions but there are multiple departments also registering individuals at the same time and in the end, they were able to register approximately 50 people before it closed.

On the agenda were the highlighted important issues from the Department of Social Services monthly report.

Mr. Sassi commented that that the report seems consistent with the past several months except for family assistance and safety net which seem to be declining.

Ms. Miller agreed that they continue to see that downward trend which is due to unemployment benefits; however, once that ends, they will see these numbers increase.

Employment and Training is working hard and conducting virtual training; however, people do not want to return to work for various reasons such as childcare issues, health concerns, COVID fear, the increase in unemployment benefits and/or any number of reasons. SNAP continues to rise as they receive up to 300 applications a week and they are working diligently to keep up. The emergency benefit for HEAP became available on January 4, 2021 with staff working hard with overtime to process those applications. Emergency Housing numbers have decreased significantly compared to previous years and they had to increase their daily rate to keep HONOR whole because utilization is so low. At the next committee meeting she will be presenting a legislative request to accept funds for three different pots of funds; EFG funds, CDBG funds and funds from the US Treasury as part of the \$90 billion COVID package deal with \$25 billion slated for assistance with households that have past rent due with Orange County eligible for \$11 million. They had the choice to either apply and implement the program themselves or allow it to go to the state for implementation. They chose to implement it themselves with support from the County Executive's office and multiple departments including Community Development who will partner closely with the Department of Social Services who will be the lead on the initiative. They have slated reimbursement by September 2021 and paid out by December 2021. These funds are for families up to 80% of the median income for the county and they can pay up to twelve months of past rent in addition to the three months bringing it to fifteen months. They can also pay for utilities, expenses and other household expenses; however, that has not been clearly defined. This will allow people to remain in their homes and to stabilize their needs. These funds do not have the same restrictions as the other two pots of funds have and they also allow them to pay utility companies and landlords directly if they are eligible.

Mr. Tuohy asked if there would be funds available for families that are not in arrears but could use assistance. Ms. Miller replied that they could assist with utilities and/or other household expenses and would not hurt for them to apply. In order to meet the federal requirements for this project they were required to purchase a software package that will allow them to get applications out to the community and meets all federal standards for antifraud. Once the software has been installed, they will get applications out to the community with the hope of having the first payment out by end of February, early March. Until then people can call 845-291-4000 to be added to the list, ask questions and/or get assistance.

Ms. Tautel asked if residents should still call the 845-291-4000 number for the EFG and CDBG funds. Ms. Miller replied currently yes; however, they may decide on a different phone number as they anticipate a large volume of calls due to the size of these funds.

Ms. Tautel asked that Ms. Miller keep the legislature updated on these treasury funds so they can share it with their constituents because they could have people who may not have qualified for New York State and/or county assistance but now qualify under the new guidelines for the federal assistance.

Ms. Miller agreed as the people would be eligible for these funds would not typically be eligible for the Department of Social Services benefit programs.

Orange County's medicaid number as of April 2020, was at 108,000 and medicaid transportation through 2019 was at approximately \$22 million for Orange County. Child Protective Services (CPS) numbers are inching toward their typical averages and the Child Advocacy Center is close to completion. Raise the Age numbers remain low with Juvenile Delinquent (JD) arrests lower than in 2019. Foster Care numbers continue to decline as they have had successful adoptions and through December 2020, they collected slightly more than \$44 million in child support.

Mr. Sassi asked if the decreases in Family Assistance, Safety Net and Emergency Housing were because they were housing fewer people in hotel/motels. Ms. Miller replied yes, as the averages for 2020 for families was 10.5% and in 2019 it was 21.1%, singles for 2020 was at 19.7% and in 2019 it was 15.4%. The trend in hotel/motels is due to the rule from OTDA to not house people in congregate care and if they did not have to house people in separate units, they would have been able to utilize HONOR more. In November, they had zero families in hotel/motels and five singles in hotel/motels. Their homeless numbers are lower across the board due to the eviction moratorium.

Ms. Sutherland moved Resolution requesting the New York State Commissioner of Health to adjust the Medicaid transportation reimbursement fee schedule for Orange County, seconded by Mr. Tuohy.

Mr. Amo explained that there was no action on the resolution they sent forward in 2019 asking that the state consider the increase with Assemblypersons Brabenec and Gunther working with them to get the New York State Health to listen. This issue could be that it would require the Governor and/or certain committee to put money in the budget to increase Orange County's Medicaid transportation reimbursement fee; however, he is unsure if that would happen this year given the budget and their current situation, but they should try. It is holistically unfair for Orange County to pay and get so little in reimbursement yet counties that are contiguous to them get a significant amount. In the past, counties ran the medical transportation program which enabled them to keep an eye on the expenses, handle them and deal with the contracts. However, the state decided to take it over and have been managing it since. They need to get their senate and assembly members on board to push this in the hope that something will happen as it is crippling some of the transportation services in the county and they could lose transportation companies that cannot afford to carry this burden and if that happens who will transport those individuals.

Ms. Miller commented that under the current status the county does not have a role in managing the Medicaid transportation rates. However, she has learned from Ulster County's Department of Social Services Commissioner Michael Iapocce that Orange County is designated as an "urban county" where Ulster County is designated as a "rural county" which seems to have some impact on the difference in the rates. She is hopeful in their endeavor and she will do what whatever she can to assist.

Motion carried. All in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 4:03 p.m.