

**HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2021
4:00 P.M.**

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

ALSO

PRESENT: L. Stephen Brescia, Chairman
Katie Bonelli, Majority Leader
Michael D. Paduch, Minority Leader
Antoinette Reed, Legislative Counsel
Steven M. Neuhaus, County Executive
Harold J. Porr, III, Deputy County Executive
Irina Gelman M.D., Commissioner of Health
Christopher Ericson, Deputy Commissioner of Health
Laurence LaDue, Commissioner, Valley View Center
Donna Strecker, Director of Finance, Valley View Center
Gretchen Riordan, Budget Analyst

Mr. O'Donnell opened the committee meeting at 4:08 p.m. and asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. All committee members were present with the exception of Legislator Luján who was absent.

Mr. O'Donnell commented on the six questions they received from the Valley View Family Council meeting last week. The council requested a list of the capital improvements for 2021, information on WiFi service, of which there are eleven items in the capital budget for 2021 totaling approximately \$2 million. They requested information on WiFi, and he was advised by the director of Client Services for Orange County that the new wireless network SSIP has been set up for residents of Valley View allowing easy one-time setup of their personally owned cell phones, tablets and devices by Valley View staff with success and Commissioner Burpoe has been in contact with Verizon to expand WiFi capability. He would carbon copy (cc) all legislators with his responses to the Valley View Family Council.

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 has completed contracts with local agencies, hiring has occurred, and implementation should begin this month. The New York State Office of Mental Health has received funding to assist with addressing the behavioral health impact of COVID-19. Orange County is one of ten counties across the state that is eligible based on COVID-19 cases for implementation of Project Hope at approximately \$1.4 million, a program of disaster mental health services funded through the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), and jointly overseen by FEMA and the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS). **The purpose of this crisis counseling program is to help disaster victims recognize that, in most cases, their emotional reactions are normal and to develop coping skills that will allow them to resume their pre-disaster level of functioning and equilibrium.** The Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) and Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) Crisis Counseling Program

(CCP) supports short-term interventions with **individuals and groups experiencing** psychological sequelae to large scale disasters. These interventions involve the counseling goals of assisting disaster survivors in understanding their current situation and reactions, mitigating additional stress and assisting survivors in reviewing their options, promoting the use of and/or development of coping strategies, providing emotional support and encouraging linkages with other individuals/agencies who may help survivors recover to their pre-disaster level of functioning. They recommended three agencies to contract directly with the state to put these responses teams together and provide services across our county and they are the Mental Health Association of Orange County, ACESS Supports for Living, and Independent Living Center. In addition, New York State Executive Orders to support telehealth have been extended and Governor Cuomo has announced that they will look to expand behavioral health telehealth practices beyond the pandemic. The New York State Department Guidance included client facing behavioral health providers and congregate care residents in 1a & 1b vaccination eligible; however, they are struggling to be vaccinated. There have been no updates regarding the New York State 20% withhold as it continues throughout the first quarter of 2021. All mental hygiene services continue to actively provide services with a majority being offered remotely/virtually.

Ms. Miller stated they sent all legislators the media updates which was created in response to the increase in substance use as a result of COVID-19. She requested that if Legislators have social media outlets that they share that information. The media updates highlight the increase in alcohol use with Orange County having six alcohol overdoses in December, fortunately there were no fatalities. However, opioid fatalities have increased, their overdose map numbers show 165 fatalities in 2019 and they are waiting on confirmation from the medical examiner's office for the number of deaths in 2020.

Mr. O'Donnell asked for the age group with the alcohol overdoses and were any school age children. Ms. Miller replied that she did not have that information available but would get it to the committee.

Ms. Tautel 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 in 2019, they presented a similar resolution to the state asking that the state consider the increase with no action. This is hurting the transportation services in the county and they could lose transportation companies that cannot afford to carry this burden. It's imperative they send this back to the state even though it's unlikely given the budget, but they should still try. They need to get their senate and assembly members on board to push this in the hope that something will happen. In the past, counties ran the medical transportation program; however, the state decided to take it over and have been managing it since. 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.

Motion carried. All in favor.

On the agenda was the monthly report on Valley View.

Ms. Strecker explained that IGT funding was at \$5.3 million, emergency disaster assistance was at \$2.4 million and other revenues were at \$38 million. On the personal services side, personal services were at \$2.8 million, equipment at \$203,895.00, contractual at \$11.7 million, employee benefits at \$16.6 million and serial bond interest at \$146,856.00.

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 today is 72% and they started taking new admissions again last week. They currently have 6 COVID-19 positive residents and 15 staff members that have either tested positive for COVID-19 or are out of work because they were exposed to a COVID-19 positive person outside of work. COVID-19 staff testing is now twice a week per the New York State Department of Health. Valley View had two COVID-19 vaccine clinics on January 4th and January 8th with 211 residents and 120 staff members receiving their first COVID-19 vaccine dose. However, 47 residents were unable to get the vaccine due to either declining it, a recent COVID-19 positive test or were symptomatic (most common fever). Their next COVID-19 clinic will be held on January 25th and 27th with residents and staff receiving second doses and first doses on those dates. February 15, 2021 is their last scheduled COVID-19 vaccine clinic for second doses for the those that received their first dose on January 25th and 27th. Family in-person visitation remains prohibited at this time, but residents are communicating with family members via window visits, phone calls and Facetime calls. Lastly, Valley View has received \$659,916.00 from the 1% medicaid supplement that was due to Valley View and they received an IGT payment of \$3,078,517.00.

Mr. O'Donnell asked for the number of employees at Valley View as only 120 received the vaccine. Mr. LaDue replied that they have over 400 staff but unfortunately, it is voluntary, and staff has not been eager to take the vaccine. He is hopeful that they will take advantage of the vaccine clinics on January 25th and 27th.

Mr. O'Donnell asked for the current protocol on new admissions. Mr. LaDue replied that they must have a negative COVID-19 test within 48 hours of admission from the hospital and they are quarantined for 14 days upon admission as a precaution.

Mr. Amo asked for clarification that staff was not required to be vaccinated. Mr. LaDue replied that it is voluntary as it is an emergency approved vaccine, they cannot mandate healthcare workers to vaccinate.

Mr. Amo expressed confusion as he recalls reading something from the Department of Labor that employers could make it a condition of employment. However, it could be against their bargaining unit.

Mr. O'Donnell noted that they would look into it, but his understanding was that they cannot force someone to get the vaccine.

Mr. O'Donnell asked for an updated on the WiFi and cell phones service at Valley View. Mr. LaDue replied that he cannot add anything more than what Mr. O'Donnell previously stated.

Mr. O'Donnell asked if the cell phones and tablets received from the Department of General Services were working and available to the residents. Mr. LaDue replied that the WiFi issue was not as significant as it was presented to Mr. O'Donnell. His understanding was that it was with individual residents WiFi networks on their personal cell phones, but they have made the changes and hope it improves.

Mr. O'Donnell added that the Valley View Family Council asked about staffing shortages which was answered by Deputy Commissioner of Health, Christopher Ericson who stated that in his opinion, this needs to be addressed with the New York State Department of Health as the oversight authority.

Mr. LaDue clarified that there was currently no mandate for nursing home staffing, and he cannot fathom how they are saying the facility is short staffed when they are not in the building and have no idea of the numbers. He added that they have had nearly 120 employees, contractors and others that have tested positive for COVID-19 or been out of work since November and while they are not all out at the same time, they do currently have 15 people out. COVID-19 has impacted their staffing at certain times, but they are in a much better position now than they were a month ago.

On the agenda was a Department Update from Dr. Gelman, Commissioner of Health.

Dr. Gelman addressed the committee stating that the Orange County Department of Health has been fully active in its response to COVID-19 and are now supporting two separate missions. COVID Case Investigations: Reviewing positive test results and preparing the information for contact tracing. Developing and implementing Quarantine/Isolation Orders. Public Health Notifications when "large scale" potential exposures have been identified and Vaccination Implementation: Tracking vaccine distribution throughout the county, helping residents determine where they can get vaccinated and implementing Departments Point of Dispensing/Distribution (POD). The department's Call Center has seen a huge increase in volume since the release of the vaccine and they continue to field calls from residents mostly on the frustration with the allocation of vaccine to the county, confusion on whether they are eligible, difficulty with registering on the state link and senior citizens unable to navigate a webpage and/or they do not have a computer, but they have partnered with the Office for the Aging so that they can assist those seniors. They have started to move into the points of dispensing/distribution process which is something that as a department and in public health statewide, they have been preparing and training for decades and they have conducted points of dispensing/distribution drills annually. Their ability to dispense medical countermeasures (vaccinate) to large numbers of people in a short amount of time has been proven and tested for many years. On January 5, 2021, the Department of Health received 800 doses of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine and on January 6, 2021, with the support of the Department of Emergency Services and a number of other departments they administered all doses to those eligible in the phase 1a category. This endeavor was conducted in the Emergency Service Center parking lot using tents and heaters. On January 8, 2021, they placed an order with the New York State Department of Health for 3000 doses of vaccine; however, they were only allocated 200 doses with which were administered on January 14, 2021. They are in the process of planning the next point of dispensing/distribution but unfortunately the demand for vaccine far exceeds the allocation. The vaccine supply goes from the manufacturer to the federal government who allocates it to the states and the state allocating to the region hub and for Orange County that would be the Mid-Hudson

Regional Hub headed by Westchester Medical Center who determines the vaccine reallocation per county and each provider entity within the county. Orange County has four hospitals, one FQHC, three pharmacies and the Orange County Health Department who are tasked with vaccine administration and allocated doses from the Mid-Hudson Regional Hub. Once additional vaccine is placed in the pipeline and released, they are confident that they could support a daily throughput of over 1000 doses per day; however, they need to receive the vaccine. As of January 18, 2021, Orange County has 28,848 cases with 986 cases over the weekend and they are averaging between 300 and 400 new cases of COVID-19 daily. Lastly, all data for New York State including Orange County is placed on the New York State COVID-19 Tracker website.

Ms. Tautel asked for the status on vaccine orders and the percentage of allocation they are receiving from the regional hub. Dr. Gelman replied that this week's allocation was around 1000 doses but until the vaccine is in hand it is difficult to say if all of those vaccines will be allocated as promised.

Ms. Tautel asked how the allocation was being based. Dr. Gelman replied that they have repeatedly asked the New York Department of Health on that algorithm because they are seeing areas receive more vaccination as would be reasonable per capita. They have stated that other factors play a role such as population density as well as rate of complication and hospitalization. It is difficult to gauge because based on their population density and rate of complication and the number of cases they are seeing, the allocation should be higher than certain areas of New York State. However, without having the actual algorithm and formula it is difficult to gauge where they are supposed to be versus where they are currently as the state is keeping that well concealed with respect to the formula for allocation.

Mr. Amo commented that the long-range goal is to have a herd immunity and/or something similar and who in New York State and/or Orange County is responsible for tracking Orange County's vaccination rate as it would enable the county to know how they are progressing. Its important that their COVID-19 website indicate their percentage of vaccinations.

Dr. Gelman replied that they have been trying to do their best by speaking to their community partners and have them report their vaccination rates to the county; however, New York State has blocked that effort and while they keep promising that there will be something similar to the COVID-19 tracker; that has not happened. In addition, it will not be as detailed as they would need it to be in order to locally coordinate their efforts. New York State has been very explicit in ensuring that those providers are not reporting the vaccine allocation and vaccination rates to the local Health Departments. They have tried to go through NYSHA and other means in an attempt to gather this local information because historically their community partners would have reported this information to them in the hopes of having local coordination but that has been vigorously and expressively blocked by New York State.

Mr. Amo asked what Dr. Gelman meant by vigorously blocked. Dr. Gelman replied that their local partners were explicitly told that they cannot. They were communicating with them and the state's position is that they would be in violation of their MOU with the state if they disclose this information to the local health departments which she has in writing from New York State Association of County Health Officials (NYSACHO) and there could be a \$1million fine associated with any violation.

Mr. Amo recommend they send a resolution to New York State asking for the number of people vaccinated in Orange County as this is just egregious. They are trying to ensure our county is ready to deal with COVID-19, yet they have no way to measure how they are doing. The state is controlling the distribution and why would they want anyone to know what a bad job they are doing.

Mr. O'Donnell agreed and suggested Mr. Amo and Dr. Gelman draft a resolution to go to the Public Safety Committee on Thursday with the okay of Public Safety and Emergency Services Committee Chairman Kevin W. Hines.

Ms. Sutherland asked if Orange County and/or the Orange County Department of Health have any intentions on making schools go to remote learning for two weeks after the February break. Dr. Gelman replied that they have not received any information from the state as of yet, so they have not come out with those recommendations and it would depend on what they are seeing at that time.

Ms. Sutherland asked about the recommendation and would the state make the decision or Dr. Gelman. Dr. Gelman replied that typically the state would tell them; however, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics more American children contracted COVID-19 from January 7, 2021 to January 14, 2021 than any other week during the pandemic. They are foreseeing alarming rates across the board for children and there are new guidelines from the New York State Department of Health with respect to the rate of community acquired transmission as they are seeing an increase in community and if those trends continue to increase it could be a distinct possibility as it is preventing transmission.

Mr. Tuohy asked for the date of delivery for the anticipated 1000 doses. Dr. Gelman replied that they typically receive deliveries on Tuesdays, but they have not received it yet today. In addition, until they receive the vaccine, she would be hesitant to say they have it and/or will have it.

Mr. Tuohy asked if the 1000 doses were from the original order of 3000 doses. Dr. Gelman replied that she would have to refer to the order as she believes it was 1400 or 1800 doses, but they also have guaranteed concurrent second doses that have been ordered.

Mr. O'Donnell asked for clarification that the 2800 doses from the original 3000 dose request was a back order and that they ordered an additional 1800 doses this week. Dr. Gelman replied that they will never receive those 2800 doses, every week is a separate week of allocation. She explained that they order first doses and then preorder the second doses as they are guaranteed.

Mr. Tuohy asked for clarification that the anticipated 1000 doses were first time vaccinations. Dr. Gelman replied yes.

Mr. O'Donnell asked if these orders were separate from the other distribution centers such as pharmacies. Dr. Gelman replied yes, they are separate allocations from the hub.

Mr. O'Donnell read the following message from County Executive: "Every week I tell the state to give us the maximum amount available and I tell them that based on our ability to get all of the vaccines delivered that they give us it on the first day we distributed." So basically, they are asking for the maximum from the state and they are not giving it to them.

Ms. Tautel asked about vaccine distribution at the hospitals and can someone register to have it done there. Dr. Gelman replied that as long as the hospital link is available and the hospital has vaccine available, they could request it; however, hospitals were initially tasked with vaccinating emergency responders. The current structure of allocation would be to go onto the New York State Department of Health "Am I eligible" tool and put in the widest radius that they are willing to travel. There are no residency restrictions so a New York resident can be vaccinated anywhere in New York State as long as they are willing to travel. However, unless they have a date, time and address for an appointment they are not registered. The backup for the "Am I eligible" link is the New York State vaccination hotline at 1-833-697-4829 with that back up phone number 1-888-364-3065. Senior citizens can also call the Orange County Office for the Aging at 845-615-3700 which will show what sites have the vaccine available. They are keeping a tight rein on which providers are receiving the vaccine and because they are bringing more providers on board, some hospitals and providers may not have the vaccine this week but could have it next week. It is very important to continually check the "Am I Eligible" site as it is the most up to date information on live links.

Mr. O'Donnell commented that Assemblyman Colin Schmitt was introducing an assembly bill on school sports participation and what was the status of Section IX sports in Orange County. Dr. Gelman replied that the guidance would come from the New York State Department of Health and no sports guidance has been made available yet.

Mr. O'Donnell asked that Mr. Ericson provide Section IX sports with an update as he knows Mr. Ericson frequents their meetings. Mr. Ericson replied that he would.

Mr. O'Donnell asked for an update on the morgue. Mr. Ericson replied that the contract has been sent to Hyman Hayes Associates (HHA) and they anticipate a signed contract by the end of the week.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.