

**HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH COMMITTEE  
MINUTES**

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2022  
4:00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Janet Sutherland, Acting Chairperson  
Michael Amo, Glenn R. Ehlers, Thomas J. Faggione, Kevindaryán Luján

ALSO

PRESENT: Katie Bonelli, Chairwoman  
Barry J. Cheney, Legislator  
Betsy N. Abraham, Legislative Counsel  
Darcie Miller, Commissioner of Social Services and Mental Health  
Dr. Irina Gelman, Commissioner of Health  
Jackie Lawler, Director of Epidemiology and Public Health Planning  
Department of Health  
Donna McCarey, Deputy Commissioner, Human Resources  
Alison Tyack, Director of Personnel Management, Human Resources  
Donna Strecker, Director of Finance, Valley View Center  
Erin Sztendor, Budget Analyst

Ms. Sutherland opened the committee meeting at 4:12 p.m. and asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. All committee members were present with the exception of Legislators Anagnostakis, Tautel and Tuohy, who were absent.

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

Ms. Miller addressed the committee and highlighted several key points in the update that was emailed to all legislators (see original minutes). They continue to monitor the New York State proposed budget items that could impact the Mental Hygiene System. An RFP has gone out for a Crisis Stabilization Center as they have a provider that qualifies and is excited to apply on behalf of Orange County. There are currently twelve in New York State, three in New York City and the remaining nine across the state. The Stabilization Center would provide an alternative by diverting people from emergency rooms and allow people to walk in for stabilization that would serve all populations. They are anticipating \$1.4 million in funding annually and \$3.5 in Medicaid billing. They have received New York State Office of Mental Health funding of \$25,000.00 for the Children's Mental Health System of Care expansion working with the Departments of Social Services and Probation, and Community agencies that will focus on single point of access for youth. They are working with pediatricians and child prescribers to meet psychiatric needs and on a product to expand collaboration and access to care. They continue to face challenges with workforce hiring and retention. All mental hygiene services continue to be actively providing services going back to in person sessions with a majority of services still being offered remotely/virtually.

Mr. Luján commented on the stabilization center which is a project he fully supports. He has been to the Dutchess County Stabilization Center on many occasions, and it is what they would want their Stabilization Center to look like. What they have done in Dutchess County is

amazing and something like this could only add to the great work that Orange County is already doing. He suggested a tour of the Dutchess County Stabilization Center to see the exceptional work they have done.

Ms. Miller agreed as it is a supportive stabilization center with the one proposed for Orange County being an intensive model that would include doctors, nurses and prescribers.

Mr. Luján asked about federal funds for harm reduction and how would they be used in Orange County. Ms. Miller replied that fentanyl strips NARCAN boxes are harm reduction measures. The most controversial would be needle exchange and while Orange County does have that it's the sites where people can go and safely use their illicit drugs. That is life saving but some people feel that they are promoting the use of illicit drugs and they would have to be a county that was ready both in hearts and minds to receive that type of harm reduction along with a community that is willing to have a facility for that purpose; however, they are not a community that is there yet.

Mr. Faggione asked for clarification that Orange County does not have a facility that provides needles and allows people to use illegal drugs. Ms. Miller replied that Orange County has a mobile needle exchange program.

Mr. Faggione asked how that program was funded. Ms. Miller replied through the New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS).

Mr. Luján commented that with the data and information available that they consider looking at what is working in other places to save lives.

Ms. Miller added that for some substance abuse is no longer a choice and ultimately becomes a chronic condition, illness and disease. There are recommended treatments with many people going through five, ten or fifteen relapses before they are successful.

Mr. Luján moved request to create four (4) Public Health Fellow II, Grade 12 positions. As stipulated positions, they will be contingent on grant funding and shall be automatically abolished upon cancellation of such funding, seconded by Mr. Amo.

Mr. Luján asked how an individual can apply for the Fellowship Program. Ms. Lawler replied that they can apply through the New York State Public Health Corps (NYSPHC) Fellowship Program on the New York State Department of Health website.

Mr. Luján asked that the link be emailed to all legislators. Ms. Lawler replied that she would.

Dr. Gelman clarified that the Fellow I position requires a Bachelor's Degree and Fellow II a Master's Degree.

Motion carried. All in favor.

Mr. Faggione moved request to create one (1) Biostatistician, Grade 14 position. As a stipulated position, this will be contingent on grant funding and shall be automatically abolished upon cancellation of such funding, seconded by Mr. Amo.

Motion carried. All in favor.

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

Dr. Gelman addressed the committee and highlighted several key points in the update that was emailed to all legislators (see original minutes). The Wastewater COVID-19 analysis project at six different Wastewater Treatment Plants in Orange County continues with quantifiable results showing a decrease in the viral load of COVID-19 in municipalities throughout the county. The department's Call Center continues to operate and while calls have declined, they continue to receive questions from the public regarding masking, vaccinations and quarantine periods. They have begun to refocus some of their efforts on the fundamentals of public health such as the sixty plus communicable disease surveillance, early intervention, community health outreach, health equity and the upcoming community assessment project. The Health Department continues to hold and schedule multiple COVID-19 POD's throughout the county while trying to concentrate on communities with lower vaccination rates such as schools. As of February 8, 2022, 19.6% of the 5-11 year old population in Orange County had received at least one dose and 15% have completed the series. In the Mid-Hudson Region, 36.3% have received one dose and 29.9% have completed the series. Orange County is tied for the lowest rate in the Hudson Valley with Sullivan County. They urge parents to speak with their healthcare providers and/or pediatricians regarding vaccination. They have seen some influenza activity but not as prevalent as years past.

Mr. Amo asked for three things they have learned from the pandemic and what needs to be changed before the next one. Dr. Gelman responded that they need to improve communication, reinforce the ranks, expanding health equity and reestablishing trust in public health.

Mr. Amo suggested that at a future meeting Dr. Gelman explain what they would be doing differently and what that strategy will be going forward.

Mr. Faggione followed up with Dr. Gelman on a conversation he had with her recently. One of the topics in his community, Orange County, and the state is the requirement for students to wear a mask in school. For clarity, what level of government is that directive from. Dr. Gelman replied that the CDC provides general overarching national recommendations; however, the actual mandate comes from New York State, specifically the New York State Department of Health with the New York State Department of Education disseminating that information amongst schools.

Mr. Luján stated that his understanding was that New York State would revisit the schools mask mandate in March. Dr. Gelman replied yes, Governor Hochul's office has indicated that after the winter break.

Mr. Luján asked if the CDC has cautioned against removing masks. Dr. Gelman replied yes. The Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) released a study on masking efficacy which is available on the CDC website. When worn properly cloth masks provide 56% lower odds of transmission, surgical masks were at 66% and K95 or N95 masks were at 83%. Parents need to

know local statistics and she reiterated that Orange County has one of the lowest vaccination rates for ages 5 to 11 is 14% and 12 to 17, is 51% in the Mid-Hudson as well as New York State. They also need to understand that COVID-19 does impact children. Approximately 25% to 30% of cases on average in Orange County were in children under the age of 18 and of the 107,544 cases since the start of the pandemic 19,655 cases were in children under the age of 18. The premise for the New York State Department of Health's stance on masks in schools is that children are in school for 7 hours a day, in close proximity and in a very densely populated environment.

Mr. Amo commented that at the beginning of the pandemic he raised the question about HEPA filters especially in the government center. He was told that while it may be a gold standard it was not the only standard, and their system does not accommodate HEPA filters, but they have used a filter that is just as good. Going forward they would do better if they had a better filtration system as any viral infection can be spread by respiratory basis. Dr. Gelman replied that would always be the case in various settings such as schools and/or any congregate settings.

On the agenda was the monthly report on Valley View.

Ms. Strecker presented the committee with the updated December 2021 financials. IGT funding remains at \$5.796 million. Other revenues were at \$38.3 million, and emergency disaster assistance at \$86,445.00. On the personal services side, personal services were at \$21.2million, equipment at \$202,088.00, contractual was at \$10.9 million, employee benefits at \$16.2 million and serial bond interest at \$104,218.00.

Ms. Strecker explained that for January 2022, IGT funding is at zero and other revenues were at \$1,595.00. On the personal services side, personal services were at \$1.6 million, contractual was at \$163,527.00, employee benefits at \$1.2 million and serial bond interest at \$3,967.00. Their census for January was 68.58%. Their medicaid utilization was at 82.52%, medicaid (HMO) at 2.63%, medicare at 7.15% and private pay at 6.98%.

On the agenda was a Department Update from Donna Strecker, Director of Finance, Valley View Center.

Ms. Strecker addressed the committee and highlighted several key points in the update that was emailed to all legislators (see original minutes). Valley View's census on February 10, 2022, was 69%. Two units remain closed; however, they are accepting short-term admissions. They currently have no COVID-19 positive residents and/or staff. All units are off precautions (residents can leave units for activities, visits, rehab, etc.) and visitation restrictions have been lifted. The Orange County Department of Health conducted a COVID-19 vaccine clinic at Valley View on February 9, 2022, with thirteen residents receiving shots (11 booster, 1 first dose and 1 second dose). Forty-six staff members have received booster shots (New York State mandated booster shots for all healthcare workers and they have until February 21, 2022, to meet that requirement. Lastly, they have received one referral for a full-time LPN from the Sign-On Bonus/Referral Bonus program.

The meeting adjourned at 5:09 p.m.