

**HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
MINUTES
(REMOTELY)**

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 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
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
Todd Craner, Fiscal Director, Department of Social Services
Ann Marie Maglione, Director, Office for the Aging
Deborah Slesinski, Budget Director

Mr. Sassi opened the committee meeting at 3:31 p.m. and asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. All committee members were present.

Ms. Tautel moved request to accept and appropriate funds from AmeriCorps Seniors, \$5,000.00, seconded by Ms. Sutherland.

Ms. Maglione explained that they were awarded the grant funds from the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) for pandemic support. The funds will be used to purchase iPads for a pilot program to help seniors remain connected with people and for telehealth. They are currently training volunteers in the information technology field to mentor seniors on telehealth. Aside from this, they are starting a letter writing campaign as older adults prefer that. A lot of this is dealing with loneliness and isolation which has been a huge factor during the pandemic.

Mr. Sassi commented that he wished it was more but the \$5,000.00 will help.

Ms. Maglione noted that the \$5,000.00 is a start with the hope being that the pilot program will produce data showing its importance and therefore providing additional funding.

Mr. Amo commented that they purchased an Amazon Echo for his 97-year-old family member so she can ask it the weather, time and set reminders on things she must do, and it has been wonderful for her. Ms. Maglione agreed that it is wonderful, they have automated dogs and cats that they give to seniors and it has helped tremendously with loneliness and isolation.

Ms. Tautel asked about COVID-19 vaccinations. Ms. Maglione replied that they are averaging 800 calls a day. When a senior adult calls the office, they ask if they have email capability and are able to sign up at the Orange County government website to be added onto the waitlist. In her office there are ten individuals that go to that list and sign-up older adults for the vaccine. If they do not have email capability and/or do not know how to use a computer, they will sign them up.

Ms. Tautel stated that when she called the Office for the Aging it did not give her an option for leaving a voice mail. Ms. Maglione replied that the mailbox could have been full; however, voice mail capacity has been increased.

Ms. Tautel added that per the Department of Health signing up on the county website does not place anyone on the vaccine list, it is just for information only. There seems to be some miscommunication and it will only get worse now that individuals with comorbidities also qualify for the vaccine. Ms. Maglione replied that her department is only dealing with the 65 and over population but those other individuals can go on the county website and sign up to be on the waitlist. She reiterated that they are not signing up to request information and whoever stated that was incorrect.

Ms. Tautel clarified that she was told that information by Deputy Commissioner of Health, Christopher Ericson and he stated that it was only for updates and information with the waitlist being separate and through the Office for the Aging.

Ms. Maglione reiterated that she was unaware of a signup for information only as the signup page is a waitlist with 15,000 people currently on that waitlist.

Ms. Sutherland commended Ms. Maglione and her staff for all they are doing as the constituents she has spoken to have had nothing but positive experiences with them.

Mr. Tuohy echoed Ms. Sutherland's sentiments as there were about 150 residents from the Town of Monroe that needed to be placed on the waitlist and they were assisted by the Office for the Aging.

Ms. Maglione thanked the many legislators that have been helping with this endeavor. For many seniors this is their golden ticket, and they are desperate to get the vaccine. In addition, they are dealing with seniors who do not have transportation to the vaccine locations, they have contracted with Jewish Family Services and Christian Farrell from the Orange County Veterans Agency who is assisting with veterans who do not go to Castle Point and they will be looking into Uber.

Mr. Vero agreed with Ms. Tautel that the system is unclear. As someone who is eligible for the vaccine, he entered his information but never received an acknowledgment and it never stated if he was on a waitlist or if it was only an inquiry. However, since then he has resubmitted his information and did receive an acknowledgment. While that part has improved it still does not indicate if you are placed on a waitlist and in his opinion, that is part of the problem.

Ms. Maglione stated that she would investigate it and get back to the committee.

Motion carried. All in favor.

Mr. Tuohy moved request to accept and appropriate pass-through funds received by the Orange County Office of Community Development from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The funds are to be passed through the Department of Social Services to implement a homeless prevention program, \$1,514,201.00, seconded by Ms. Tautel.

Ms. Miller explained that Director Nicole Miller from Office of Community Development put together a summary of the three requests for funds that are being presented today and she will forward that to the committee. They will be conducting outreach with community leaders to market the program and to begin the process of applying for these funds. This is federal funding that is coming through the Office of Community Development except for the \$11 million in U.S. Treasury funds. They are able to use the funds currently for Rapid Rehousing as well as homeless prevention but with the moratorium that has been extended through June restricts them from using these funds in both A and C categories until the person is able to show that they are imminently or currently homeless.

Ms. Bonelli commented that both she and Legislator Tuohy sit on the Community Development Advisory Committee and they reviewed the options on where the funding would be used, and they knew that they needed to cover as much of Orange County as possible. She commended Ms. Miller and her staff and the Office of Community Development as they are doing a remarkable job.

Motion carried. All in favor

Ms. Tautel moved request to accept and appropriate funds from the U.S. Treasury of the 3rd COVID-19 Stimulus funding. These funds were applied for by the Department of Social Services, while working in unison with Orange County Community Development. These funds are to be passed through the Department of Social Services to provide Rental Assistance for those from 30-80% of the area median income, who meet need requirements resulting from COVID-19, \$11,486,480.00, seconded by Ms. Sutherland.

Ms. Miller explained that these funds are more flexible but there is a time restriction on their disbursement. These funds focus on assisting landlords as well as the tenant so if a landlord has ten tenants that are in arrears, they can in collaboration with the tenants apply for these funds

as opposed to the ten tenants applying separately. It would also apply to people that are at risk of homelessness and they could pay up to twelve months of rent arrears with the potential of an additional three months. It could also be applied to utility arrears and other household needs. In addition, 10% of the total are administrative funds which allows them to use those funds to increase temporary staff to assist with the implementation and to purchase software. Lastly, 65% of the funds must be appropriated by September 2021 and 100% spent by December 2021 which is a short period of time. However, they are on hold because they are an option as a municipality to accept the funds directly or have it go to the state and be part of the state's distribution. They chose to implement it themselves with support from the County Executive's office; however, a week after making the decision to take the funds directly the state reached out to them as well as the other municipalities who were receiving the funds directly and asked that they hold off and consider doing one state plan with all funds staying within the county with the only requirement being for the local municipality to conduct outreach with the state developing the plan from application to disbursement of funds. The last communication they received from the state was last Monday and they had hoped to have answers to their questions by the end of last week but it is now Tuesday and they have still not received a response so they are preparing to move forward as though they are implementing the entire project while knowing that more than likely the state will come to an agreement with the U.S. Treasury and they will join the statewide project with everyone working similarly/same across the state.

Motion carried. All in favor.

Mr. Tuohy moved request to accept and appropriate pass-through funds from the Orange County Office of Community Development (Community Development Block Grant Program). These funds were originally received by the Orange County Office of Community Development from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The funds are to be passed through the Department of Social Services to implement a homeless prevention program. The Department of Social Services will specifically look to assist those individuals and families experiencing homelessness (or at risk of homelessness) resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, \$1,000,000.00, seconded by Ms. Sutherland.

Ms. Miller stated that with the moratorium in place they have been limited on their ability to use these funds as they apply to individuals that are currently homeless. The advantage of these funds is that they have until August 2023 to expend them.

Mr. Tuohy commented that this was a great collaboration between these two departments.

Motion carried. All in favor.

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

Mr. Sassi commented that homeless numbers continue to decrease and while that it's a good sign it is tied into the moratorium.

Ms. Miller reported that Temporary Assistance and Family Assistance numbers for 2020 ended with very low numbers as both areas saw significant decreases. They have also seen a decrease in employment numbers which is why Employment and Training has expanded some of the support they provide. SNAP continues to rise as they are seeing a significant number of applications. Due to the extremely cold weather, they are seeing a large increase in HEAP applications. She addressed recent issues with their phone systems as they manage the switchboard at 845-291-4000 and calls for both SNAP and HEAP and 845-291-2002. Since they have been on an A/B work schedules they have had less people manning the phones and they can take up to 11,000 calls a day and can hold 88 calls at any given time. However, with only having half the staff in the office due to the A/B schedule and the number vacancies in that unit they are not able to manage the phone calls that are coming in, but they are working diligently to manage this need. They are also working with the county's Information Technology department to adapt a very complicated call center into something that is web based and accessed remotely and they hope to see improvement soon. If they receive any complaints and or have concerns, please contact her or Deputy Commissioner Irene Kurlander. In January 2019, they had 178 residents that were homeless and/or temporarily housed and in January 2020, they had 116. Child Protective Services caseloads are below average as compared to previous years due to the pandemic and schools are not reporting as quickly but they open and available to work with every school and they conduct a monthly meeting with the Newburgh Enlarged City School District to help them engage students and they meet bi-monthly with BOCES and other school superintendents. Raise the Age remains consistent, Foster Care had an average of 307 in 2020, Adult Protective Services remained consistent and Child Support Collection came in at approximately \$44 million for 2020.

The meeting adjourned at 4:10 p.m.