

**HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2020
3:30 P.M.**

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

ALSO

PRESENT: L. Stephen Brescia, Chairman
Kevindaryán Luján, Legislator
Antoinette Reed, Legislative Counsel
Harold J. Porr, III, Deputy County Executive
Darcie Miller, Commissioner of Social Services and Mental Health
Todd Craner, Fiscal Director, Department of Social Services
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
Donna McCarey, Deputy Commissioner, Human Resources
Ann Marie Maglione, Director, Office for the Aging

Mr. Sassi opened the committee meeting at 3:34 p.m. and asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. All committee members were present with the exception of Legislator Sutherland who was excused.

Mr. O'Donnell moved request to accept inter-municipal agreements between the County of Orange and each of the following municipalities: The Town of Blooming Grove, the Village of Greenwood Lake, the Village of Montgomery, 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, 2020 through December 31, 2020, seconded by Mr. Tuohy.

Mr. Touhy asked for a breakdown of the funding percentages from the county, federal government and State of New York. Ms. Maglione replied that she did not have that information with her, she would get it to the committee.

Motion carried. All in favor.

Ms. Tautel moved request to accept and appropriate federal funds in support of the AAA Professional Development Program, \$111,950.00, seconded by

Motion carried. All in favor.

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

Ms. Miller reported that Temporary Assistance and Family Assistance continue to trend down with 1700 cases. They have been informed by Employment and Training that they currently have more jobs than people, resulting in people being employed right away and SNAP numbers showing a slight decline. A second HEAP benefit has been authorized and will continue through April 27, 2020 and those that have received their first benefit will now qualify for a second benefit. Also, they have seen a significant reduction in families in hotel/motels. They have been advocating on behalf of local governments for the possible contribution increase from counties based on the state crisis with respect to medicaid even though they have very little influence over medicaid costs that will reach \$1 billion and/or higher in orange county. In addition, the medicaid design team put forth by Governor Cuomo has been tasked to recommend ways to reduce \$2.5 billion costs.

Ms. Tautel asked if they were referring to entry level positions with respect to employment. Ms. Miller replied that typically it would be entry level, but it would depend on their skill set. Everyone receiving temporary assistance has a work requirement and with the decrease in their caseloads they have less eligible people for employment and, of the 1700 cases. 66% are exempt from work programs.

Mr. Amo asked if the economy has contributed to the decrease in SNAP. Ms. Miller replied yes, people are working and making more money. However, even though their caseload numbers have decreased, they still receive approximately the same number of applications because people are still applying even if they may not be eligible because they are struggling although they are still working.

Mr. Amo asked about the changes implemented by the federal government. Ms. Miller replied that approximately two years ago they put work requirements on singles so any able-bodied individual receiving SNAP benefits must participate in work programs with some falling off because they preferred not to meet the work requirement.

Mr. Luján commented on the federal governments reduction of SNAP benefits and asked if the county has done anything to offset the concerns expressed by various organizations. Ms. Miller replied that any reduction would be a challenge for someone receiving SNAP benefits. They have put Orange Cares in place to help extend the backpack program and many pantries throughout the county are using the Hudson Valley Food Bank. In addition, it is through volunteerism, philanthropy and generosity that keeps people fed.

Mr. Luján asked if Ms. Miller knew if other counties were using their own resources and/or funds to offset the changes implemented by the federal government. Ms. Miller replied no.

Mr. Amo asked about the variance in singles under the Emergency Housing Placement graph. Mr. Craner replied that graph makes it look much more significant than it is and if they did it from zero to twenty as opposed to fourteen to twenty it would not look so skewed.

Ms. Miller added that there really is no an explanation as it depends on when they show up and are housed.

Mr. Amo asked about the progress of the fishbone graph. Ms. Miller replied that the diagram has been designed but they must bring the stakeholders together so that the information can be compiled.

Mr. Amo commented that if they could look at each one of the "bones" they may be able to fix some easier than others. Ms. Miller agreed.

Mr. O'Donnell asked about the difference in May 2016 to 2017. Ms. Miller replied that she would have to go back and look at the data.

Mr. Tuohy asked about the Point-in-Time Count that was recently conducted. Ms. Miller replied that she has not received the official data, but she understands that there were differing impressions across the county with possibly less homeless in the Middletown area as opposed to the Newburgh area.

Ms. Tautel provided the committee with a summary of her experience during the recent Point-In-Time Count. She and Legislator Luján participated in the 6:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m. slot in the Point-in-Time Count on January 24, 2020 in the City of Newburgh. They were in one of two groups with their group encountering approximately twenty homeless individuals with many suffering from mental health issues, substance abuse issues, job loss and homelessness due to the death of a parent, but they were able to connect some to RECAP and they will be placing signage in both English and Spanish on the new location at the Department of Health in Newburgh. After the Point-in-Time count she along with Legislator Luján held a debriefing meeting with Harry Porr, Deputy County Executive; Darcie Miller, Commissioner of Social Services and Mental Health and representatives from the Newburgh Ministry and HONOR to see what recommendations could possibly be made to this committee. The challenge is that some individuals do not want the help, will go into a hotel but not a shelter, citing issues with theft and injury; however, that could not be verified. It was enlightening to talk one-on-one with these individuals, and she would encourage her fellow legislators to participate in the Point-in-Time Count as opposed to a fishbone graph.

Ms. Miller replied that they have a host of stakeholders and agencies that are part of the solution with Orange County and they are committed to the homeless. What Ms. Tautel has stated is not new information. They are familiar with many of the people Ms. Tautel spoke of and she appreciates Ms. Tautel's sensitivity and her commitment.

Mr. Sassi pointed out that this is a nationwide epidemic with many suffering from mental illness that this nation has turned its back on including New York State and, the fact is, that they cannot force them to get help.

Ms. Tautel commented that they need to focus on supportive and affordable housing throughout the county and they as a legislature and a committee need to take a harder look at what they can do to support and/or create programs along those lines.

Mr. Luján stated that he has shared his concerns on numerous occasions about the subhuman conditions that people are living in because that is all they can afford. In his opinion, they can do more and he would like to help Commissioner Miller by knowing what they could be adding more funding to in order to help as there is a clear gap. There are many organizations that are willing to do housing; however, they need the funds to do it.

Mr. Sassi added that Governor Cuomo put a great deal of money in the budget this year for affordable housing, but they will have to see how that pans out.

Mr. Amo emphasized the need for data.

Mr. Anagnostakis asked if they knew how many the second group encountered and did the two groups cover all of the city of Newburgh and how did it compare to the last count. Ms. Miller replied that the Point-in-Time Count is a federal mandate and conducted by Consortium of Care (COC) which Christopher Molinelli is president and he would have the details.

Mr. Luján replied that the two groups probably did not cover the city of Newburgh in its entirety. When he participated last year, he recalls encountering people on route to the shelter but no one that he personally met that was looking for housing. However, this year they encountered people living in abandoned units that were not far from the shelter. In his experience he saw a drastic difference between last year and this year.

Ms. Miller added that a change in temperature could affect that.

Mr. Sassi asked Mr. Amo for the specific data he would be looking for in the fishbone graph. Mr. Amo replied all the variables that contribute to 100% of the problem and then look at the data on it so that they can determine the "hot" spots which would enable them to focus on areas that could be addressed sooner rather than later.

Ms. Miller replied that with all the work they have done, and their understanding of the multiple issues, it can be tied to other situational homelessness or chronic homelessness. Subsidized affordable housing is needed to address the issue and that is not a county role but a municipality role as they make the decision on whether they can have the housing there. Cities are usually considered first, however, the cities have decided to not have those projects in their communities which would have helped to address some of their homeless issues.

Mr. Sassi explained that a few years ago Governor Cuomo placed \$20 billion toward fighting homelessness in New York State and in the 2020 budget he placed \$2.5 billion and another \$457 million for intergenerational housing. It is not for the government to build the housing but for someone such as Mr. Mandelbaum or HONOR. Orange County is not in the business of building houses and, that is for the best, as it should be handled by private industry. The real issue rests with the municipalities; however, they do not have any control over that. In his opinion, the state will eventually tell every municipality that they must build a certain number of affordable housing, but they are not at that point. In the Town of Wallkill, Mr. Mandelbaum is building intergenerational housing with funding from the State of New York.

The meeting adjourned at 4:09 p.m.