

**HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE  
MINUTES  
(REMOTELY)**

**TUESDAY, APRIL 20, 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  
Kevindaryán Luján, Legislator  
Kathy Stegenga, Legislator  
Betsy N. Abraham, 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  
Nicole Anderson, Director, Community Development  
Gretchen Riordan, Budget Analyst  
Liz Delaney, Budget Analyst  
Dina Sena, Budget Analyst

Mr. Sassi opened the committee meeting at 3:32 p.m. and asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. All committee members were present.

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 numbers continue to decrease due to expanded unemployment benefits and the eviction moratorium. Even though caseloads are down SNAP applications have increased so they have approved overtime and reassigned staff to meet the 30-day regulatory requirement. Emergency housing placements continue to see a downward trend with HONOR Ehg having below normal averages in their congregate settings. They are only using hotel/motels to isolate someone due to COVID-19 with no families being housed in hotel/motels in January or February. The federal government has waived recertification for medicaid benefits and are only processing new applications and as of August 2020, Orange County had 114,435 individuals receiving medicaid. In the first two months of 2021 Child Protective Services has seen an increase in caseloads and they anticipated those numbers increasing as children returned to school. Raise the Age numbers remain low and Foster Care numbers are the lowest they have been in five years at 295. April is Child Abuse Awareness month; it is a national effort to acknowledge that children should be able to live in an environment that is free from harm and to have the opportunity to succeed and the Department of Social Services staff has created a

blue pinwheel garden to promote prevention. On Friday they will have the virtual ribbon cutting for the Orange County Child Advocacy Center and all legislators are invited to attend virtually.

Ms. Tautel moved request from the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance is administering the Rental Assistance Program funded as part of the Federal Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 and the American Rescue Plan of 2021. As a result of these acts, New York is expected to receive a total of approximately \$2.3 billion from the U.S. Department of Treasury with \$1.4 billion directly allocated to New York State, \$442.9 million directly allocated to New York City, and \$419.7 million directly allocated to 13 counties and 10 other municipalities. OTDA is seeking to partner with the counties, cities and towns that are receiving direct allocations from the U.S. Treasury in an effort to streamline the program statewide, maximize the dollars available to serve needy residents, and reduce fraud. The Orange County Department of Social Services requests approval to transfer its initial allocation of U.S. Department of Treasury funds in the sum of \$11,486,480.00 to New York State to facilitate said partnership. Resolution No. 47 of 2021 approved a supplemental appropriation to the 2021 Orange County Budget for the Orange County Department of Social Services for these funds, seconded by Ms. Sutherland.

Ms. Miller explained that they had decided to take the funds directly since that had not heard anything from New York State prior to the U.S. Treasury reaching out. They received the funds and immediately began working with multiple departments to assist with administering the program even with the amount of workforce, services and resources it would take to do so. New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) reached out to them and explained that they would like to do a statewide program for consistency of care and efficiency in use of funds in order to get the funds to the homes that need it the most. Orange County agreed and expressed their interest in learning more; however, they heard nothing for months. With the lack of information coming from the state and the connection to the budget they continued to parallel plan with direct administration in case what the state developed did not match what they felt was needed and if their terms did not match what Orange County felt would best benefit Orange County residents. New York State passed and agreed on legislation with the budget that met the terms resulting in the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) issuing the documents that were included with the legislative request. When the documents were received last Tuesday, their committee convened quickly to review the documents and quickly agreed that it would be best to redirect the funds to New York State for numerous reasons. They have agreed to develop a full portal that will be operational no later than May 15<sup>th</sup> and that portal will take the application, verify that they meet the criteria for funding and will issue the check directly to the landlord. While that process sounds simple it is actually very complicated and the state is willing to take all of that responsibility. In addition, they have arranged with the U.S. Treasury for them to redirect the funds to them and hold Orange County harmless for any responsibility to the U.S. Treasury regarding these funds. New York State will be taking all accountability and responsibility in meeting the U.S. Treasury's regulatory requirements and monthly reporting. They have offered to the county to maintain 10% which was

allowable for administrative costs and that the county does marketing, advocacy assistance and outreach. They have looked at their community and where their lowest Area Median Income (AMI), poverty levels, highest percentage of renters and the areas with the highest impact related to COVID-19 and they know where they need to do outreach and they have already begun. Nicole Andersen, Director, Community Development, has led an effort with Focus Media and to put together a marketing campaign and they have recruited and are ready to go into contract with part time staff to assist with application assistance and outreach. They are required to complete an application with New York State for the approval of the \$1.4 million and/or 10% of the total funds for administrative fees. While it is difficult to give up control of managing and administering the program directly, they collectively agreed that this was the best route to go.

Mr. Amo asked to what degree of certainty does Ms. Miller have that Orange County will receive their fair share. Ms. Miller replied that they are considered a municipal cooperation who received direct funding and they will take the communities that were directly funded and agreed to redirect to New York State in a separate account and they will calculate the funds for Orange County. The \$11.4 million that Orange county received will be spent in Orange County; however, the funds would only be redirected anywhere in the state would be if Orange County, before the end of the funded period, states that they do not need any more funds then the funds would be redirected to other parts of the state. At this point all of the applications from Orange County will be received and funded up to the approximately \$10.2 million after the administrative fee is removed. They had feared that with the huge need in New York City and with them only receiving 20% of the funds but needing 80% of the funds that all of the funds would be redirected to New York City; however, that will not happen under this agreement with the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance(OTDA).

Motion carried. All in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 3:51 p.m.