

**HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH COMMITTEE
MINUTES
(REMOTELY)**

**TUESDAY, MAY 19, 2020
3:30 P.M.**

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

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
John S. Vero, Legislator
Kathy Stegenga, Legislator
Antoinette Reed, Legislative Counsel
Darcie Miller, Commissioner of Social Services and Mental 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 4:05 p.m. and asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. All committee members were present with the exception of Legislator Anagnostakis who was absent.

On the agenda was the monthly report on Valley View.

Ms. Strecker explained that they received \$2.2 million in IGT funding and approximately \$584,000.00 less than last year. Other revenues were at \$11.5 million and \$3.2 million in additional revenues that would be posted to the May general ledger. On the personal service side, personal services were at \$7.5 million, overtime was at \$622,642.00, equipment was at \$54,658.00, contractual was at \$2.9 million and employee benefits at \$6.8 million and serial bond interest at \$77,365.00. In addition, they have not felt the impacts in their census for March and April; however, she estimates that they will see a reduction of \$584,000.00 in revenue for March and April.

Mr. LaDue presented the committee with a brief departmental update. The COVID-19 response is ongoing with new regulatory changes pertaining to staff testing and admissions from the hospital. The New York State Department of Health is requiring nursing homes to test their employees and a plan was submitted to the New York State Department of Health on May 12, 2020. Valley View supports testing their employees/contractors; however, this mandate was not properly planned for before it was released. Testing twice per week does not follow recommended CDC guidelines of once a week with facilities responsible for the costs. Valley View's conservative estimated cost for testing is a minimum of \$60,000.00 a week but New York State has realized this cost burden to nursing homes, and they are working on clarifying how testing will be paid for. New Jersey and Pennsylvania have also adopted this measure so testing supplies may be in short supply with test results taking longer as labs will be inundated. This could result in testing staff

unnecessarily if they are getting tested a second or third time without getting the first test result back. Staff that has previously tested positive for COVID-19 or staff that have tested positive for SARS-Cov antibody will be exempt from testing. They have encouraged staff to get the antibody testing if they were sick and had a negative COVID-19 test. Valley View will begin testing employees the week of May 18th. In addition, COVID-19 positive hospital patients can longer be discharged to nursing homes.

As of May 18, 2020, their census is 279, with 63 COVID-19 positive cases in-house, 46 of these residents have been taken off precautions and 26 residents are in isolation. There have been 45 COVID-19 positive deaths (31 long-term residents and 13 short-term residents). They have had 68 employees test positive, but a majority have returned to work. To date Valley View has received \$912,459.00 in stimulus funding and they have applied for additional funding with the 2020 CARE ACT Provider Relief Fund and the Mother Cabrini Health Care Foundation COVID Emergency Support Grant.

Their staff has received tremendous support from family, community groups and the County Executive's office. There have been many free food events for staff and the County Executive secured a gift card from local businesses that included a \$25.00 ShopRite gift card, hand sanitizer and two cloth face coverings for every Valley View employee. In addition, Valley View continues to receive much needed support from various departments throughout the county.

Mr. O'Donnell asked for clarification that the federal guidelines state that all residents and staff will be tested weekly; however, New York is saying it must be done twice. Mr. LaDue replied that New York State can make their own guidelines and they have decided on twice a week for employees.

Mr. O'Donnell asked if they were still taking resident temperatures twice a day. Mr. LaDue replied that they are still monitoring temperatures of both residents and staff daily. If a resident displays any symptoms they will be retested.

Mr. O'Donnell asked if all residents and staff are still required to wear masks. Mr. LaDue replied that depending on their breathing capabilities not all residents can wear a mask.

Mr. O'Donnell asked if all staff has adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Mr. LaDue replied yes.

Mr. O'Donnell asked if they need any additional equipment. Mr. LaDue replied no.

Mr. O'Donnell asked if they were still not permitting outside visitors in the facility. Mr. LaDue replied that they were not.

Mr. O'Donnell noted that federal guidelines state that there will be no outside visitation until there are no new cases for 28 days in the facility and is that information being tracked. Mr. LaDue replied yes, as they report daily to the New York State Department of Health.

Mr. Luján moved resolution of the Orange County Legislature in support of New York State Senate Bill No. 7922 and Assembly Bill No. 10157, an act in relation to directing the study of health and environmental impacts

from implementation of 5G and future generation wireless network system technology and small cell distribution antenna systems in New York State, seconded by Ms. Tautel.

Chairman Brescia explained that he knows that 5G is eminent and is already in Boston and New York City but before it is implemented across the state, he would like to see a study completed on the health and environmental impacts. He also understands that the city of Santa Barbara passed a resolution rejecting 5G technology.

Ms. Tautel asked about funding for the study and would they be putting the onus on the cellular companies or state government as the resolution does not include that information. Chairman Brescia replied that they would add an additional WHEREAS with that information as he agrees it should be funded by the cellular companies.

Motion carried. All in favor.

Mr. Amo moved resolution of the Orange County Legislature designating June 21 through June 27, 2020 as Helen Keller Deaf-Blind Awareness Week, seconded by Ms. Sutherland.

Motion carried. All in favor.

Commissioner Darcie Miller of the Orange County Department of Mental Health presented a brief departmental update. She explained that the Orange County Department of Mental Health continues to operate and respond to the needs of the community. The county's 311 is up and running and the Mental Health Association is weeks away from answering the national suicide hotline calls in Orange County and for the first time be able to answer their own calls. The pandemic has brought out anxiety in people that have never experienced it before and increased the symptomology for those that are already struggling. Their crisis response team is out in the field and working closely with law enforcement and making decisions telephonically to have people transported to hospitals for evaluation. The county operated Outpatient Mental Health clinics as well as substance use and mental health providers across the county have seen a significant increase in their show rates by using telephonic and telehealth modes of intervention. Typically, no-show rates are around 30%; however, they have seen those rates reduce to between 10% and 13% over the last two months. Opioid deaths are neck and neck with last year and they continue to send the message on supportive services with NARCAN training being conducted virtually as Dr. Gelman has partnered with them so that she can prescribe NARCAN.

Mr. Luján asked about masks and hand sanitizer as there are many residents in his community that suffer from mental illness and substance abuse, and do they have a stockpile for distribution. Ms. Miller replied that the New York State Office of Mental Health sent a supply to the Orange County Emergency Operations Center and a specific message was relayed to all their providers that it was to be distributed to those individuals that are receiving mental health services. In addition, the Office of Temporary Disability Assistance also sent items for those that are homeless which was picked up last Friday. Materials are available, if they know of agencies that can distribute to those that are receiving mental health, substance abuse and/or homeless services, they can reach out to her directly and she will pass it on to the Orange County Emergency Operations Center.

Mr. Luján asked if they had any additional masks for legislators to distribute. Ms. Miller replied that she would have to follow-up with the Orange County Emergency Operations Center as they are managing all Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Ms. Sutherland commented on the frustration many of her students and families are feeling during this remote learning time and how the crisis hotline and 311 have been wonderful. Ms. Miller replied that they are adding a message to the Text 4 Teen line which is 1-845-391-1000 so they can reach out in a mode that they are most comfortable communicating in.

Legislators Tautel, Tuohy and Vero expressed their gratitude to Ms. Miller, her staff and the staff at the Orange County Emergency Operations Center.

Ms. Stegenga asked they have seen a major influx of calls with respect to abuse and/or violence during the pandemic. Ms. Miller replied no, they are concerned because they have seen a reduction in calls as the "gatekeepers and the eyes and ears" are not gaining access to children and why they have been so determined to get the message out to the community in various messages.

Mr. O'Donnell addressed the departmental update from the Department of Health. He compared the update dated May 19, 2021 with the update from April 17, 2020. He then highlighted the new information as follows: As the department starts moving into summer operations, permitted facilities like children's camps, campgrounds, mobile food services and public gatherings (street fairs etc.) have become an area of uncertainty. We are working with the New York State Department of Health on when or if, some of these operations will be allowed this season. Coordination with nursing homes and their administration to help them comply with the Governor's Executive Orders on testing staff and residents has been on-going; Instead of working 7 days a week in April they are now down to 6 days a week. The large push of data that was sent to the department about a month ago has been entered and the team is currently up to date with current lab results and reporting. This could not have been done without the support of multiple other departments and their staff who were trained by our department to do this type of work. We are currently scaled down on the number of staff from other departments that we need to use but may reactivate them if need. The department is now working with leadership in the cities of Middletown and Newburgh to conduct door to door outreach with residents and businesses. This outreach campaign will address COVID-19 safety in which educational materials and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) can be distributed in areas of these cities which have shown increase positive cases.

Mr. O'Donnell noted that he was surprised that the city of Port Jervis was not included in that outreach. He was currently working on a consent resolution with respect to nursing homes and New York State. He will be calling for an independent investigation of nursing homes throughout the state. The New York State Attorney General is conducting an investigation which he is sure will be helpful; however, this is a bipartisan issue. He quoted Democratic Assemblyman Richard Gottfried ..." It is time to have the Health Department and the Attorney General looking at what individual nursing homes are doing. But there needs to be a professional review of not only the industry as a whole but what the Department of Health has been doing, both leading up to this situation and in the midst of this situation" In New York alone they have had over 5,000 deaths in nursing homes, and he will be bringing this resolution to the floor. The resolution last month called for the reversal of the policy that placed infected patients into Valley View and he was pleased to see that clearer heads prevailed and that was reversed. However, when asked by the press if this was a reversal, they replied no, it was a new policy. Please get the politics out of COVID-19 because people are

dying, and they need to do more, and they need to do it now. He apologized to the committee that no one was present from the Health Department to answer any of their questions today. Lastly, he recently learned that the Health Department was looking at a new building and how they could think it would be appropriate to ask for a new building in the middle of this crisis is insane. In his opinion, they should be concentrating on one thing only, saving lives.

Chairman Brescia noted that they have done a horrible job with their nursing homes as compared to Texas and Florida and they needed to do a much better job in New York City. He commended Mr. O'Donnell for bringing this resolution forward.

Mr. Faggione addressed Mr. O'Donnell's comment on the city of Port Jervis. He commended the leadership of the city of Port Jervis and the job they have done in keeping the citizens informed and they are blessed and grateful that the numbers in the city of Port Jervis are very low. He can understand the need for outreach in the cities of Middletown and Newburgh as they are in crisis based on their numbers.

The meeting adjourned at 4:44 p.m.