

**HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

**TUESDAY, MAY 21, 2019
3:30 P.M.**

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

ALSO

PRESENT: L. Stephen Brescia, Chairman
Katie Bonelli, Majority Leader
Leigh J. Benton, Legislator
Antoinette Reed, Legislative Counsel
Harold J. Porr, Acting County Executive
Darcie Miller, Commissioner of Social Services and Mental Health
Todd Craner, Fiscal Director, Department of Social Services
Terri Torchio, Director of Economic Independence, Department of Social Services
Christopher Ericson, Deputy Commissioner of Health
Irina Gelman M.D., Commissioner of Health
Christopher Ericson, Deputy Commissioner of Health
Michael Ventre, Deputy Commissioner of Health
Laurence LaDue, Commissioner, Valley View Center
Colleen Grogan, Chief Budget Analyst
Gretchen Riordan, Budget Analyst
Alison Tyack, Director of Personnel Management, Human Resources
Christopher Molinelli, Executive Director, HONORehg,
President, Orange County Housing Consortium

Mr. Amo opened the committee meeting at 3:30 p.m. and asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. All committee members were present with the exception of Legislator Sassi who was absent.

Ms. Tautel moved request to reclassify
Fiscal Manager, Grade 15, position
#52670 to Fiscal Analyst, Grade 16,
seconded by Mr. O'Donnell.

Ms. Miller explained that a desk audit was performed, and it was determined that the position should be upgraded and reclassified from Fiscal Manager, Grade 15 to Fiscal Analyst, Grade 16.

Motion carried. All in favor.

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

Ms. Miller stated that they continue to trend downward in Temporary Assistance and Safety Net with SNAP benefits remaining consistent. They are currently conducting an analysis on their caseloads to determine how many are exempt from employment due to mental health and/or substance abuse needs or physical health. Currently 50% meet that criteria and the information has been shared with the Public Welfare Association and Office of Temporary Disability Assistance to see how they might plan differently for the complexity and needs of those individuals struggling with these challenges. Child Protective Services cases continue to increase, and Raise the Age numbers remains low. They have not filled any of the six positions allotted in their budget for Raise the Age but will continue to monitor it closely. At a recent commissioner's meeting the issue of homelessness was discussed at great length with other counties across New York State facing the same challenges. Between now and 2021 Foster Care will be impacted by the Family First Act as they will need to increase their kin gap as they are currently at 20% but they need to reach the national average of 30% which for Orange County will be a 10% increase and they have voluntarily engaged with one of the foundations for technical assistance to help them reach the 10% increase at no cost to the county. In addition, their congregate care levels need to be reduced to 12%. These are children that are placed in out of home placements and institutions. This will result in a huge savings for both the county and state but also necessary due to the reduction in federal reimbursement in 2021.

Ms. Tautel asked if eligible HEAP recipients would be eligible for the air conditioner program. Ms. Miller replied that they do have a cooling grant; however, she was not sure if they would be eligible for air conditioners.

Ms. Tautel commented that understanding was that those who qualify for HEAP would also be eligible for an air conditioner. Ms. Miller replied yes, but only if they did not receive one previously.

Ms. Tautel asked if they knew how many could be served with the grant. Ms. Miller replied that she did not presently have the information but would get it to the committee.

On the agenda was an update and discussion on homelessness in Orange County.

Mr. Amo explained that they wanted to bring Mr. Molinelli back to continue the discussion on homelessness, where they are as a county and what they can do to address this issue.

Mr. Molinelli noted that since his last appearance before the committee, he has met with several Legislators on fiscal issues and resident's quality of life. While a lot has been done since he was last here the HONOR shelter remains full with their youngest resident only two weeks old and their oldest in his 80's. Though they are making progress every day there is still much more that can be done.

Mr. Molinelli presented them with the Point-In-Time Count from January 25, 2019 (see original minutes). The point-in-time count was conducted and sponsored by Continuum of Care (CoC) a conduit for all HUD funding in Orange County. The information provided is based off the most confirmed population of Orange County with data collected from 2017. On the night of January 25, 2019, they had 589 people sheltered and unsheltered in Orange County with the largest number being children under the age of 17 and sheltered families at 222. In 2018, HONOR housed 1008 women and children at any given time.

Mr. Amo asked how often the point-in-time count was conducted. Mr. Molinelli replied that the mandatory point-in-time count is done annually the last week of January with three scheduled for next week in collaboration with police departments in Port Jervis, Middletown and Newburgh.

Mr. Amo asked if the data was trended year-to-year and how is the data from the cities extrapolated to fit into their point-in-time count in rural areas. He would like to see how they have been trending over the last five years and are they getting better, worse or have they remained the same. Mr. Molinelli replied that in 2018, they had 480 confirmed homeless and in 2019, they had 589 an increase of 109 from last year. They have seen that their data collection has improved, and the teams have expanded to faith-based, law enforcement and fire safety. In addition, he would garner the information requested by the committee.

Mr. Benton commented that it would take days to walk every street in the City of Newburgh to accurately get the correct homeless number and how is that extrapolated.

Mr. Molinelli replied that a great deal of groundwork is done three to four months prior to the point-in-time count with the night of the count consisting of eight teams. They are collaborating with other outreach teams, police departments, communities and their call center. A hotline is established for the day of the count and distributed via mass media. This year's slogan was "Everyone Counts in Orange County" and they requested that anyone with information. He reiterated that this is a point-in-time count but they are out in the community daily.

Mr. Amo asked about the methodology and does the projection show if they are getting better or worse. Mr. Molinelli replied that data collection is improving.

Ms. Miller interjected that in 2016, they had 355 in the point-in time count who were housed so numbers have increased. In years prior, they had numbers nearing 500 with 589 being the highest number she has seen in close to a decade. Many of the numbers they receive are already part of their system and housed as homeless so the 589 people in the point-in-time count were not found on the street.

Mr. Amo added that there must be a way to project the areas that they were not able to get to. Mr. Molinelli replied that he would not want to take an educated guess but the web of people they are utilizing for these counts are growing.

Mr. Amo asked Mr. Molinelli if the 589 was on target for the whole county. Mr. Molinelli replied yes, as 91% of the confirmed homeless during the point-in-time count were engaged in a licensed shelter or approved warming center; however, they do need to do a better job with the 9% percent who despite services being offered refused assistance.

Ms. Tautel asked how they are reaching the homeless in smaller communities like the Towns of Woodbury and Highlands and are they being added to the count. Mr. Molinelli replied that he would hope they were included in the count.

Ms. Tautel asked for clarification that the point-in-time count was done primarily in the cities. Mr. Molinelli replied no, the point-in-time count was spread across the county.

Ms. Torchio added that HONOR communicates with police departments across the county along with their outreach workers.

Ms. Miller added that with Code Blue legislation, law enforcement, outreach workers and volunteers go out when weather conditions fall below 32 degrees. If someone has a mental illness and are out in weather conditions below 32 degrees, they can bring them into an emergency room even against their will for an evaluation to determine if they are safe to be out there.

Mr. O'Donnell asked of the 51 unsheltered what was the percentage that were living in abandoned buildings and/or a makeshift shelter. Mr. Molinelli replied that HUD uses the definition of "unsuitable for habitation."

Mr. O'Donnell asked how many of the 51 unsheltered were living in abandoned buildings and are they tracked. Mr. Molinelli replied that it is not separated in that manner.

Mr. O'Donnell suggested they collect that information next year because he would like to know who was living in an abandoned building and refused help as opposed to someone living in a cardboard structure and if someone is found living in an abandoned building it should be documented.

Mr. Molinelli replied that they could collect that information.

Mr. Amo commented that while they may not be able to solve the problem they could drill down and possibly find a small area that they can do something about.

Mr. Tuohy asked if the 51 were approached and encouraged to come in. Ms. Torchio replied that outreach workers always try to bring them in. They also try to reach the individuals in warming stations that are not currently working with the Department of Social Services to assist them with permanent housing.

Mr. Tuohy asked for clarification that if weather conditions are below 32 degrees, they can forcibly bring them in under the law. Ms. Miller replied only if they meet the criteria for Mental Hygiene Law and are a danger to themselves or others due to a mental illness. However, if someone is exposing themselves to the cold and do not have a mental illness they do not have an involuntary mechanism to bring them in.

Mr. Anagnostakis asked for the number of people on each team. Mr. Molinelli replied that there were 8 teams with an approximate total between 30 and 40 including law enforcement.

Mr. Anagnostakis asked for the number of teams in 2018. Mr. Molinelli replied 6 teams with 3 people per team.

Mr. Anagnostakis stated that the number seems to have increased by 100 year over year and or about a 22% increase with 30% increase on the teams conducting the count.

Mr. Anagnostakis asked if they had an increase of 100% would they find an 80% increase in the total sheltered and unsheltered. Mr. Molinelli replied that he would hope not, and he

is confident in the number they produced. While they could have missed a few individuals, he does not believe they missed 30 percent more.

Mr. Anagnostakis inquired as to who pays for the point-in-time count and could Mr. Molinelli request at no additional cost an increase in the number of individuals conducting the count. Mr. Molinelli replied that the data collection comes from Continuum of Care (CoC) federal funds, the outreach and organization comes from funds that HONOR receives, and the rest is through community volunteers.

Mr. Anagnostakis asked if Mr. Molinelli anticipates more people for the count next year. Mr. Molinelli replied that he hopes they do.

Mr. Amo asked if they had a more robust methodology with more people would they get a more accurate number on homelessness in Orange County. He requested information on how the teams are formed, trained and what additional funds would they need in their budget to ensure the count is accurate.

Ms. Sutherland commented that Mr. Molinelli previously stated that a great deal of this work is done two to three months prior to the count. On this evening teams are constantly rotating, and in her opinion, they would not see a tremendous increase based on all of the work that is done beforehand.

Ms. Torchio emphasized that the point-in-time count is only one piece. The numbers they have with respect to their homeless problems come from their warming stations and daily walk-ins and they have those statistics because they are housing them and helping to fund the warming stations through Code Blue funds. They know daily how many people are in the warming stations, shelters and how many hotel/motels must be used. While the point-in-time count is significant, they need to see it in all the data they have.

Ms. Miller pointed out that the committee receives homelessness numbers in their monthly report that are in HONOR, shelters and hotel/motels.

Mr. Amo requested a copy of their methodology and what degree of error they have.

Mr. O'Donnell asked what type of legislature they would need in Albany to assist them in being successful. Ms. Torchi responded that they need safe and affordable housing in Orange County for the people that are as poor as the people they are housing in their shelters because even in Orange County low-income housing is unaffordable for these individuals.

Ms. Miller suggested the Padavan legislation which addressed group homes for people with developmental disabilities and/or mental health issues. Because of this legislation zoning boards in municipalities cannot discriminate against that population unless they do not meet certain criteria. The current challenge for Orange County is having additional safe and affordable housing and over the last few years they have lost 175-unit possibilities because municipalities were not open to having those affordable housing units in their communities. The county cannot force a municipality to approve safe and affordable housing but if they want to advocate for people who are homeless then the state could pass legislation that could change how they determine whether they have the housing or not.

Mr. O'Donnell asked for the hours of the Point-In-Time Count. Mr. Molinelli replied that it started at 12:00 a.m. on January 25, 2019 and ended at 11:59 p.m.

Mr. O'Donnell asked what cooperation they receive from law enforcement. Mr. Molinelli replied that it has gotten better over the last three years.

Mr. O'Donnell recommended he speak to the Orange County Sheriff and Major at the New York State Police.

Mr. Molinelli replied that they are fortunate to have the support of the Police Chief's Association.

Mr. O'Donnell asked if law enforcement was provided with a hotline number for the day to assist any officer on patrol who may encounter a homeless individual. Mr. Molinelli replied yes.

Mr. O'Donnell stated that he doubts the troop commander gets that information because when he was with the State Police, he never received a bulletin on the point-in-time count and/or a phone number. If it comes from the Troop Commander, Sheriff or Police Chiefs it will be done but it will not be done if it only comes from the Police Chief's Association.

Mr. Molinelli clarified that he communicates with eighteen individual police chiefs but he does not have a connection with the New York State Police.

Mr. O'Donnell responded that he would look into it for Mr. Molinelli.

Ms. Tautel expressed the desire to participate in the upcoming point-in-time count and suggested that in the future information on when the point-in-time counts are to be done be sent to all legislators and county employees prior to the event as they may be interested in participating.

Mr. Amo suggested that they as legislators talk to their communities about the issue of affordable housing and there could be incentives that are available if they chose to work with them.

Mr. Amo added that they contribute a great deal of money to various organizations throughout the county and if they work together, they may get a better handle on what they can do to improve.

Mr. Benton stated that in his opinion, the number is very low, and they are missing the people who do not want help. The 91% currently in the system have requested and seek out help and there has to be more than 60 people in the county and cities that don't want to ask for help and/or don't think they need help. And what can they do to get to those people.

Ms. Miller replied that on any given night warming stations can have between 60 to 80 individuals and of the 589 there were 51 unsheltered and another 60 to 80 using warming stations that they are working to engage on a regular basis. The definition they are using in this discussion is a HUD definition meaning they do not have shelter. When the look at homelessness across the board it is larger for those that are temporarily living with a relative or friend, but they are not counted in this report. When school districts look at homeless numbers their numbers are much higher throughout the county as those people have a safe place to stay although it may only be temporary and not system involved. This number has been an accurate number for decades and the

Point-In-Time Count has been something they rely on to help plan for and support services in the county and under HUD's support and direction across the country. The mode may not be perfect but the model has been designed by HUD and implemented in counties across the country under their direction. Mr. Molinelli and the team do a phenomenal job but there is always room to do more.

Mr. Amo commented that while someone may be staying with a relative or friend now, in three years they could be the county's problem and something they should be thinking about now.

Ms. Torchio added that they try to work preventively with individuals to try to get them into permanent housing before they end up in a shelter. They are working daily with people who are still housed with various funding streams available to assist in paying back rent and helping to get someone into an apartment. They work with both children and adult services.

Mr. Amo noted that he is trying to see if they can get ahead of the situation.

Mr. Molinelli thanked the committee for their time and stated that they work on drafting a concept paper and address the questions that have been presented.

Mr. Anagnostakis requested a copy of the point-in-time counts for the last ten years including team counts and the per capita rate throughout counties in New York State.

Ms. Miller replied that it would be a HUD reported count but the New York State Office of Temporary Disability Assistance could have the information.

The meeting adjourned at 4:27 p.m.