

**HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

**TUESDAY, AUGUST 17, 2021
3:30 P.M.**

PRESENT: Rob Sassi, Chairman
Mike Anagnostakis, Janet Sutherland, Laurie R. Tautel, Peter V. Tuohy

ALSO

PRESENT: L. Stephen Brescia, Chairman
Katie Bonelli, Majority Leader
Betsy N. Abraham, Legislative Counsel
Darcie Miller, Commissioner of Social Services and Mental Health
Todd Craner, Fiscal Director, Department of Social Services
Liz Delaney, Budget Analyst

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 with the exception of Legislators Amo and O'Donnell who were excused.

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 decline. The eviction moratorium is in place until October 2, 2021, and the enhanced unemployment benefit is scheduled to end on September 6, 2021, and once that occurs, they anticipate that people will be requesting assistance and they are preparing to respond to those needs. SNAP numbers continue to increase, and the new HEAP season will begin October 1, 2021. A recent report from the New York State Office of Temporary Disability Assistance vendor shows that their Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) numbers have decreased. They currently have 1,676 applications and of that number they have 1,386 applicants that have asked for prospective rent up to 3 months and 424 applicants that have asked for utility arrears. However, they still do not have any information on the total dollar amount connected to those applications nor has any funds been put out to the community. When criticism of this hit the local news outlets a letter from Governor Cuomo come out stating that by the end of August, they would be able to process a majority of the applications and get funds out to the community. The total number of Orange County residents on Medicaid as of February 2021 was 119,436. Child Protective Services caseloads have increased and are back to their typical numbers, Foster Care numbers were at 292 and Raise the Age numbers remain low.

Mr. Anagnostakis asked about Child Protective Services and the difference between the Tradition Response Reports and Family Assessment Response (FAR) Reports. Ms. Miller replied that a traditional response requires a full investigation and then make a determination of neglect and/or abuse within a sixty-day time frame. The Family Assessment Response (FAR) is handled similarly to a traditional response as the investigation takes an alternative approach to providing protection to children by engaging families in assessing child safety and family needs and to assist in finding solutions and to offer support in caring for their children. However, it could be upgraded to a tradition response if the family refuses to cooperate and/or they discover something more serious happening.

Mr. Anagnostakis asked about the upcoming 25% increase in SNAP benefits by the federal government and how would that effect Orange County. Mr. Craner replied that it was a raise that had not been done in several years. SNAP benefit recipients will see an increase, but the funds only run through them as they come directly from the state to the recipient.

Ms. Miller added that she would attribute the increase to the increased cost of groceries.

Mr. Sassi asked if hotel/motel was primarily federal reimbursement. Ms. Miller replied that a family would receive the benefit for less than sixty months and that would be reimbursable; however, for singles they pay 70%.

Mr. Sassi asked if they would see a savings because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the eviction moratorium. Ms. Miller replied yes, because shelters like HONOR have not been fully utilized and to keep their doors open and to maintain outreach during this time, they have increased the daily rate.

Mr. Sassi asked if they have seen an increase in mental health issues with Adult Protective Services. Ms. Miller replied that they have seen more mental health issues across the board. Prior to COVID-19 one in five adults were struggling with mental health challenges but since the pandemic that has been increased to one in four and they have definitely seen an increase in mental health challenges among their aging population.

Ms. Miller added that WELCOME Orange Geriatric Initiative was awarded a grant of \$300,000.00 annually for the next five years. This program has helped many senior citizens across the county that are struggling.

Ms. Sutherland asked if most agencies were back to in person services and was she concerned that they would go back to virtual meetings. Ms. Miller replied that the Mental Hygiene System required all services be done face to face as needed with ZOOM recommended. For the Department of Social Services both Child Protective Services and Foster Care remained in the field and active; however, they were limited on visitation due to the pandemic. She is concerned that they could go back to a larger degree of the remote experience, but they must do what is safe. The Department of Mental Health still has people doing a mix of in person/remote with a majority still being done remotely.

The meeting adjourned at 3:46 p.m.