

**HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE  
MINUTES  
(REMOTELY)**

**TUESDAY, AUGUST 18, 2020  
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  
Barry J. Cheney, Legislator  
Thomas J. Faggione, Legislator  
Kevindaryán Luján, Legislator  
Kathy Stegenga, Legislator  
Darcie Miller, Commissioner of Social Services and Mental Health  
Deborah Slesinski, Budget Director  
Gretchen Riordan, Budget Analyst

Mr. Sassi opened the committee meeting at 3:33 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 continue to trend downward, but they are preparing for an increase in those numbers once the unemployment benefit runs out and/or is reduced. Due to the upcoming school sessions being either hybrid models and/or remote learning parents will continue to have difficulties returning to the workplace and they are monitoring that closely. In addition, Employment and Training has begun to see an upward trend in unemployment. They remain challenged with the increase in SNAP benefit applications coming in; however, many do not qualify because of the increase in the unemployment benefit but when that increased benefit ends, they will see more people become eligible for that SNAP benefit. HEAP payments are still being processed and they are close to closing out the 2019-2020 season. While Emergency Housing numbers are lower, they correspond with hotel/motel numbers and the need for social distancing. In addition, HONOR is now receiving guests so they will start to see those number increase. They are working closely with Director Nicole Andersen in Community Development and Continuum of Care (COC) as they prepare for the moratorium to be lifted on evictions with the last number from the Mental Hygiene Legal Services at 997 pending evictions; however, they anticipate that number increasing. They have compiled a package and are working with the funds received through Community Development and the cities of Newburgh and Middletown to ensure they can assist families. If people are struggling to pay their rent and are at risk of being evicted please have them call 845-291-4000 in order to support them in maintaining their housing. They have seen an increase in Child Protective Services in both traditional response and family assessment response and they anticipate an additional increase once school starts again. Raise the Age numbers remain low and manageable. They are looking to do a collocated youth center that would involve the

Department of Probation, Department of Mental Health and Department of Social Services coming together in the same location and because of COVID-19 they were able to achieve the same outcome through a virtual connection between the three departments and in collaboration with community agencies. In January legislation changed requiring the county be responsible for covering the expense of any youth in residential placement under Persons in Need of Supervision (PINS) with county taxation. In November 2019, there were seven Persons in Need of Supervision (PINS) youth in placement, and they were able to safely bring them back out to the community with supports to keep them in the community with no Persons in Need of Supervision (PINS) youth's being placed this year. Foster care numbers have decreased which could be attributable to children that were not brought to their attention; however, they have been working hard to keep families together. Late last year, the legislature approved funding from the state for a collocated substance abuse professional with their child protective services and they have done a great job by working together and working to keep children in their homes and parents engaged in treatment for a better outcome and she is considering the possibility of increasing the FTE's in that collaboration. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic New York State suspended investigations with that staff reassigned to assist with SNAP applications and the Orange County Health Department with tracing responsibilities but they are now back in their unit and conducting their normal duties.

Mr. Sassi asked about hotel/motel placement and the federal reimbursement. Ms. Miller replied that the pilot with HONOR has been working well. They took ten slots and added them to Housing First model of permanent housing as opposed to placing them into hotel/motels. They have seen an increase in the hotel/motel usage due to COVID-19 and the need for social distancing as they were encouraged by the state to move people to hotel/motels to reduce the potential spread of COVID-19. They are fully reimbursed for families with less than 60 months of benefits with the county paying 72% for singles with local taxation. As expensive as hotel/motels are, shelters are more expensive as meals, laundry, transportation and support for permanent housing is connected to them. So as costly as hotel/motels are they are not ideal as people are left out there without the support to move them into permanent housing.

Mr. Amo asked about medicaid cuts, the effects it could have on community health and what expectations they may have. Ms. Miller replied that they took a 2% cut for medicaid hospital care, but the mental health side was not hit with that cut. The most significant impact locally will be through the lookback for people who are applying for home health assistance through medicaid. As of October, they will be required to do a 30-month lookback before they can approve eligibility for medicaid and homecare services. In the past they would have done eligibility based on their current circumstances but just as with skilled nursing facilities and long-term care they need to do a five-year lookback which could eliminate people's ability to be eligible for home health aides. New York State Homecare operated through local governments was to be eliminated; however, Orange County still maintains a caseload with a small staff operating it. Due to the new change in eligibility for medicaid they are anticipating an increased need along with the increase in workload due to the intensive review process. In addition, New York State is withholding some state reimbursements that should have previously been distributed.

Mr. Amo added that the speculation is that those individuals will go into long-term care and wait for approval. Ms. Miller agreed.

Mr. Amo asked about the current number of home healthcare in Orange County. Ms. Miller replied that the number of cases in the Department of Social Services is 219; however, if

they look at the expense in medicaid they can see how much is being spent on home healthcare. There is actually so much need that there is not enough direct care workers to fill all the hours.

Mr. Tuohy asked about the progress of the Monroe-Woodbury high school satellite clinic. Ms. Miller replied the attorneys are still working on putting the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in place. They have federal funds forthcoming and they have identified agencies to assist with the implementation with approximately \$1.5 million coming to Orange County and specific to assisting with COVID-19. The Department of Mental Health is looking at a 9-month project that would target the teams of counselors in order to help students, families, teachers and overall community to improve their mental health wellness through the COVID-19 experience.

The meeting adjourned at 3:55 p.m.