

**HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

**TUESDAY, AUGUST 22, 2023
3:30 P.M.**

PRESENT: Janet Sutherland, Chairwoman
Mike Anagnostakis, Laurie R. Tautel, Peter V. Tuohy

ALSO

PRESENT: Katherine E. Bonelli, Chairwoman
Barry J. Cheney, Legislator
Betsy N. Abraham, Esq., 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
Kerry Gallagher, Commissioner of Finance
Liz Matis, Budget Analyst

Ms. Sutherland opened the committee meeting at 3:32 p.m. and asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. All committee members were present with the exception of Legislators Ehlers and Ramos, who were absent.

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

Ms. Miller addressed the committee stating that they would be meeting with Employment and Training to help support those living in shelters and/or hotel/motels that are not working and connect them to services. They are seeing slight increases in temporary and family assistance. SNAP applications remain high with 40% of applications being denied for over income. Some people are applying with incomes as much as \$40,000.00 over the income eligibility requirement. Cooling season ended on July 15, 2023, and HEAP ended with 26,000 payments being issued. All \$100,000.00 of the Fuel Fund will be fully expended between HEAP and the Cooling Season. Homelessness remains a great concern due to the lack of availability. A statewide study on homelessness was conducted by the University of California with many of their recommendations being on par with their own such as access to affordable housing for extremely low-income households, expand targeted homelessness prevention, address behavioral health needs, increase household incomes through evidence-based employment support, outreach and service delivery to people experiencing homelessness. The cost and demand of shelter has led them to where they are now, and it will take time to get them to the other side. They will be meeting with various departments to look at the number of units across the county, and what they need to truly accommodate the population in Orange County. Medicaid recertification remains steady and as of July 31, 2023, 73% of their local share has been recertified. Child Protective Services numbers have increased, and Foster Care numbers continue to decline. She addressed the SNAP/EBT card fraud that occurred in 2022 where twenty-two consumers in Orange County were affected. The federal government will be replacing those benefits and have allowed the State of New York to reissue those benefits and they were advised that these individuals will receive these benefits in October. A procedure is now in place for anyone that has their benefits electronically fraudulently stolen from their EBT cards. Lastly, Child Welfare Workers Appreciation Week starts September 15, 2023.

Mr. Anagnostakis asked about the increase in SNAP applications from individuals that are over the income eligibility requirement. Ms. Miller replied that prior to the pandemic they received about 125 applications a week; they are now receiving about 250 a week.

Mr. Anagnostakis asked if people with higher income levels are applying because they are desperate for help. Mr. Miller replied yes, and they are monitoring and supporting food pantries to assist those with food insecurities. New York State will also be issuing another pandemic benefit for SNAP households with children under the age of six.

Ms. Tautel asked if there were any other programs besides food pantries. Ms. Miller replied that if they are ineligible for SNAP, they receive a state generated letter advising them that they do not qualify. However, she would look at the letter to see exactly how it reads and if other resources are offered.

Mr. Anagnostakis asked if income levels are indexed for inflation. Ms. Miller replied yes.

Mr. Amo asked what three things the Department of Social Services is doing to have the greatest impact and improve their homeless number. Ms. Miller replied that they are not improving the homeless numbers, but they have outreach workers, they are working closely with the Department of Mental Health and Department of Social Services and various contract agencies.

Mr. Amo asked if Ms. Miller was given a significant amount in her budget to address homelessness what one program would have the greatest impact. Ms. Miller replied the Rental Assistance Program.

Mr. Tuohy asked if there was a time frame and/or an unlimited amount of funds for the Rental Assistance Program. Ms. Miller replied that provided they continue to receive the funds, they can continue to assist the households they currently help.

Mr. Tuohy asked about homeless assistance for returning veterans. Ms. Miller replied that they have federal and state funds specifically designated for veterans and housing. Homeless veterans are monitored, and at last count they had five in Orange County.

Mr. Tuohy asked if they had any additional fraudulent EBT cases. Ms. Miller replied no.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.