

**HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
MINUTES
(REMOTELY)**

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 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
Kevin W. Hines, Legislator
James M. Kulisek, Legislator
Kevindaryán Luján, Legislator
Kathy Stegenga, Legislator
John S. Vero, Legislator
Antoinette Reed, 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
Deborah Slesinski, Budget Director
Gretchen Riordan, 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.

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

Mr. Sassi commented that while the number of people being served on Temporary Assistance, Emergency Housing and Hotel/Motel has declined that could be attributed to COVID-19 and the eviction moratorium. The larger question is the poverty level in Orange County and the lack of affordable housing resulting in the need for social services assistance.

Ms. Miller reported that homeless numbers are trending down, and they are housing those that are eligible for temporary housing and hopefully to permanent housing. The COVID-19 crisis has brought to the forefront that they do not have enough affordable housing options in Orange County and with people not being evicted the market has dwindled so they do not have the housing to connect people to. Many not-for-profits are working diligently to get zoning approved for both large and small projects and they need to remain focused on bringing in as many state funds as possible to support those types of units. Warming stations in the cities of Port Jervis, Middletown and Newburgh have opened with New York State's Code Blue called across the county when they anticipate temperatures dropping to 32 degrees and/or below. HEAP season has begun, and their staff is working diligently to process those applications. Temporary Assistance numbers remain low and they are working closely with Community Development and putting federal funds aside to assist

those that have been unable to pay their rent due to COVID-19 and are at the risk of being evicted. Some of the funds to be used for different criteria's; however, they are hopeful that the most recent funds could be used sooner and before the eviction moratorium is lifted. In addition, Employment and Training has begun to see an upward trend in unemployment. They have seen some stabilization in SNAP applications; however, with a second wave they may see similar trends to the initial wave for which they are concerned. Orange County's medicaid number is over 105,000 with New York State taking a generous position during a health pandemic to quickly process applications and to spend little time on details and approving eligibility. Their Child Protective Services (CPS) numbers are starting to increase as they work with schools to provide services and support to their students. The Child Advocacy Center is close to opening at 30 Matthews Street in Goshen. For about a year the staff in Child Protective Services and Child Welfare have been working on addressing Disproportionate Minority Contact knowing that statistically in research, actuality and the numbers in Orange County they have a much higher percentage of children of color and Hispanic and have been in training and receiving guidance from the Office of Children and Family Services and working to put new plans in place to reduce those disproportionate numbers. They are on the cusp of implementing a blind removal process and where a multidisciplinary team will convene to determine the circumstances and make a joint decision on the removal of that child from their family home. They will have no knowledge on geographical location and/or ethnicity in the decision making. This will ensure that they are safeguarding against any potential bias related to the ethnicity of the child and/or family in question. Raise the Age numbers remain low and manageable and Foster Care numbers continue to decline.

Mr. Tuohy asked if Ms. Miller had a preliminary idea of what funds would be needed from the Community Development fund. Ms. Miller replied that the application has been created and will be going out into the community with many of the stakeholders involved in housing including Hudson Valley Legal Services who has a list of those with pending evictions. Evictions can still occur if the reason for the eviction is other than COVID-19 and the inability to pay their rent as a result. A single point of access has been created with all of the stakeholders which will enable them to take all of the applications based on the criteria of that application and it will be at that point that they will be able to sense the overall needs and approximately three months ago the number was 992 pending evictions; however, they anticipate that number increasing. In addition, some of the funds dedicated toward this could be used to help with mortgage assistance.

Mr. Tuohy asked for the amount given to Community Development. Ms. Miller replied that the initial funds were for \$1.5 million; however, the funds being discussed currently could put in an additional million.

Ms. Tautel asked if there were more individuals currently in hotel/motels. Ms. Miller replied no, and in September there were no families in hotel/motels and only four singles.

Ms. Tautel asked if the CDBG grant funds could be used to help food pantry's restock. Ms. Miller replied that it would be a Community Development question. At the request of the County Executive, the Department of Social Services put \$100,000.00 in to assist food pantries to meet the demands of the pandemic for about six months. That has since been extended and they are currently giving another \$100,000.00 to the Food Bank of the Hudson Valley to continue those efforts.

Ms. Tautel noted that some food pantries do not have a standing account with the Food Bank of the Hudson Valley and rely on donations; however, those individuals are also struggling and are unable to assist with those donations.

Ms. Miller explained that there are several food banks that are connected with the Food Bank of the Hudson Valley and the reasoning behind the distribution of those funds. They have been very accountable on how they monitor and use the funds, the amount of meals that are distributed, and every dollar put in amounts to approximately \$10.00 in food. She agrees that there are so many layers to feed people and the generosity of some may not be available right now due to the impact of COVID-19.

Ms. Tautel asked if a food pantry could still access food to restock their shelves through the Food Bank of the Hudson Valley due to the emergency COVID funds. Ms. Miller replied that she cannot say definitively but she would say yes.

Ms. Bonelli commented that Community Development funds are very specific as to how they are utilized and the eligibility for those funds. Both she and Legislator Tuohy sit on the Community Development advisory committee and they have been briefed on how the funds must be used which is as a last resort for funding various needs throughout the county. The homeless population and housing are more precedent in that there are not a lot of different pots of money that could go toward it; however, with the food pantry there are numerous resources that could be used. The advisory committee felt that the best use of the funds would be to address these potential evictions.

Ms. Tautel thanked Ms. Bonelli for the clarification. They are seeing more people come to food pantry's that were not coming previously because where they were getting food once a week is no longer enough and are resourcing other food pantry's also.

Mr. O'Donnell stated that the Newburgh Amory Unity Center distributes food to between 600 and 700 families every Wednesday from approximately 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and they would welcome any legislator that would like to help.

The meeting adjourned at 3:59 p.m.