

**HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
MINUTES
OCTOBER 3, 2007 – 3:00 P.M.
SCOTT HEYMAN CONFERENCE ROOM**

Present: N. Shinagawa, Chair, M. Robertson, M. Koplinka-Loehr (arrived at 3:08 p.m.), F. Proto, M. Sigler
Staff: P. Carey, D. Bodnar, Department of Social Services; L. Holmes, Office for the Aging; S. Whicher, County Administrator; R. DeLuca, Mental Health; A. Cole, B. Crosby, Health Department; N. Zahler, N. Zook, Youth Services; M. Lynch, Public Information Officer; K. Schlater, Human Services Coalition; P. Meskill, Sheriff; K. Fuller, Deputy Clerk
Legislators: T. Joseph
Guests: C. Sanchirico, Catholic Charities; D. Schumacher, S. Schwartzbach, Learning Web

Call to Order

Chair Shinagawa called the meeting to order at 3:05 p.m.

Chair's Report

Mr. Shinagawa did not have a report.

Additions to the Agenda

Mr. Shinagawa added an update on the Human Rights Commission case involving Amanda Kearny, an Ithaca Central School District student.

Deletions from the Agenda

There were no deletions from the agenda.

Human Rights Commission

Ms. Martel-Moore stated she wanted to clarify comments made at the October 2nd Legislature meeting with regard to individual's abilities to obtain services via the Albany Human Rights Commission, noting it is not an agency able to provide remedy.

She provided an update on the case, noting that temporary restraining order was received as a result of the school district's request to postpone any action until the hearing before the appellate district on October 5th. Once the arguments are heard the 3rd Appellate District will make a decision that will affect not only Tompkins County's local law, but every local, city, and State human rights law with regard to the right to investigate discrimination within any school. She indicated that although a 1983 decision made in Monroe County against the local Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) by the 4th Appellate District clearly indicated the right to undertake such an action, Tompkins County is within the 3rd Appellate District and they have a right to make a decision.

Mr. Koplinka-Loehr arrived at this time.

Ms. Martel-Moore said that if the school district's case were successful the ruling would then become an issue between the 3rd and 4th Appellate Divisions.

She then indicated that the local Human Rights Commission completed their investigations in 2006 and has not been involved further. In addition, she noted that Ms. Pastel, Superintendent of the Ithaca City School District, requested a meeting with Human Rights Commissioner Joyce Muchen. Ms. Martel-Moore said the case is to resolve the issue of harassment and there is no monetary claim involved.

Health Department

Ms. Cole, Public Health Director, gave members of the Committee bottled water made available through a grant program to bring about awareness of the importance of flu inoculations. A logo developed by staff and a label stating “Be Flu Safe Tompkins County” was placed on the water bottles as well as a flyer that will contain information and logos of the various partners of the campaign. In addition, Ms. Cole provided members with the Pandemic Flu Planning Report prepared by Dutchess County and the Early Intervention 2006 Report for their information. She reported the first flu clinic will take place next week and that they are seeking high-risk individuals first, with home health nurses assisting for homebound individuals. This year the pandemic exercise will target high-risk individuals and is still in the planning stages.

RESOLUTION NO. – APPROPRIATION FROM CONTINGENT FUND – TERMINAL- PAY REIMBURSEMENT – HEALTH DEPARTMENT

It was MOVED by Ms. Robertson, seconded by Mr. Proto, and unanimously adopted by voice vote by members, to recommend approval of the following resolution to the full Legislature. RESOLUTION ADOPTED.

WHEREAS, the Health Department had a Senior Clerk retire effective August 11, 2007, and WHEREAS, the Fiscal Policy of Tompkins County allows for terminal-pay reimbursement from the Contingent Fund, now therefore be it

RESOLVED, on recommendation of the Health and Human Services and the Budget and Capital Committees, That the Director of Finance is hereby authorized and directed to make the following budget appropriation:

FROM:	A1990.54440	Contingent Fund	\$1,631
TO:	A4012.51000518	Senior Clerk	\$1,173
	A4012.58800	Fringes	\$ 458

SEQR ACTION: TYPE II-20

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Ms. Cole, Public Health Director, read the following statement:

“The decision to move the Health Department to Brown Road is a monumental one. My past comments have been misconstrued and I would like to clarify them for the public record.

“My support for the Dates Drive site was evident. The reason I supported and advocated for this site was because I sincerely believe that building a new building is always better than trying to fit a department into an existing structure that had a much different use. This was evidenced by moving DSS to Biggs A and the Health Department to Biggs B. Proximity to the hospital is also important to our programs. And lastly, Dr. Hermann Biggs was a pioneer in public health and specifically TB. I’m not sure if calling the facility on Brown Road – “the Biggs Building” will translate well, since our current site is the children’s wing of the former TB hospital. But I would hate to lose the historical value of the Biggs name. It is no secret that I live in Trumansburg and that I enjoy my current short drive with no traffic lights to negotiate. Doubling my mileage and tripling my commute time is not the reason I supported the Dates Drive site. In my professional career I have driven much greater distances to work and at one time worked outside the county.

“My role in the Brown Road site design is to assure that it meets the needs of our programs, staff, and customers. I do not want to see programs jammed into a building only to discover many problems and inadequate space. It would be horrific to come back after one year or less and say we need more space. I think the building at 55 Brown Road is a lovely building and area and want to assure that it will meet our needs for years to come.

Ms. Cole inquired what the status of the Health Department Building Committee is due to the resignation of the Chair. Mr. Joseph said he is waiting to hear from several individuals to know whether they are interested in serving on the committee.

Ms. Robertson said she appreciates the concerns expressed by Ms. Cole, noting it is one point of view. She said as a legislator she is obligated to look at the bigger picture and the savings represented by moving to the Brown Road location and perhaps expand at a later date if necessary. She expressed a desire to have Ms. Cole provide the Health Department staff with the leadership needed to make the transition.

Mr. Proto said he stands by comments he has previously made. He said there is some disagreement between legislators regarding the decision and believes it will continue. Mr. Proto said he is setting up a meeting with Mr. Flash, Assistant County Attorney, to review the proposed real estate agreement between the County and Cornell for 55 Brown Road.

Office for the Aging

Ms. Holmes provided an update on consumer-directed health care. Although the State will allow use of funds for this service, legislation was thought to be required in order to amend regulations to allow consumer-directed care. Legislation was introduced, however a determination was made to provide for consumer-directed care through policy amendments. At this time, the necessary paperwork is at the Governor’s level awaiting the State Department of Health comments. It is believed this policy change will go through, but it is unknown when.

Mr. Proto requested to be updated on this topic as changes occur. Ms. Robertson noted that Ms. Mattick, Workforce Development Director, will be providing a workshop regarding health care employment opportunities.

Youth Services

Youth Living Independent Survey Discussion

Ms. Zook and Ms. Zahler thanked the Committee for providing an opportunity to further discuss the results of the survey presentation made at the October 2nd Legislature meeting. Ms. Zook said that although 204 individuals were surveyed it is unclear what the total number of youth with similar difficulties.

It was noted that since the 2003 survey transportation has not become as much of an issue as it had been; work will continue with Mr. Mengel at the Department of Social Services to improve transportation services. With regard to housing, the number of low-income units has increased, but many youth have stumbling blocks due to credit issues and required deposits. Ms. Zahler spoke of the Learning Web’s request for a Federal proposal that would provide transitional living apartments throughout the County.

Mr. Schumacher spoke of this proposal that would provide subsidies over the course of 12 – 18 months for rent and utilities. During that period sliding-scale rent would be charged, and that amount

would be placed in savings. The goal of the program is to provide clients with affordable housing, work with them to improve their wages, build credit, etc. At the end of the period the client would be paying full rent and could then transition into other housing, utilizing the rental funds set aside for security deposits and other necessary items.

The Committee discussed the September 24th Fair Market Rental report and noted that the rents far exceed the monthly \$350 for rent and utilities received for a single individual on public assistance. Ms. Robertson spoke of hearing that Federal HUD housing programs that have been in existence for many years being cut with funds diverted to maternal group homes. Ms. Zahler said she wanted to discuss with Ms. Carey who would be the right individuals to discuss the situation. She said perhaps having discussions that include the survey participants with State Legislators such as Assemblywoman Lifton would be useful to determine what could be done to amend the housing allowance.

Ms. Carey said there are several different funding streams that could assist with the housing assistance problem. Separating youth may be successful and she spoke of New York City setting aside some funding to supplement rentals. In addition, there are pilot projects to supplement housing for disabled adults. She believes changing the basic housing allowance may be difficult, finding alternative funding sources would be more successful.

Mr. Proto said that New York City is allowed to collect and charge income tax in addition to property tax that may be what is providing the funds received. He said the County should to make certain there is not additional burden on local property owners to provide a subsidy, particularly with organizations receiving tax abatements that do not pay tax. Ms. Carey explained that a waiver would be required to obtain permission for any form of assistance in rent. She believes looking for other funding is the best way to deal with the problem and would like to see State funds pulled into the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

A brief discussion occurred with the certification process for services, particularly for the underage youth and how it is difficult to be able to provide services due to regulatory constrictions. Ms. Robertson asked that whatever circumstances, help the youth to be safe and then assist the youth to work out a better relationship with parents.

Mr. Schumacher said that although it does not appear the grant will be provided, it was designed to provide assistance while requiring case management, rents, etc. to help the young people to learn how to reach self-sufficiency. The Committee discussed the various programs and ideas to find ways to assist this particular group of youth, the results working with existing programs have had, and what steps might be taken in the near future.

Ms. Zahler provided information on the 30th anniversary of Youth Services. She also reported that the new 2-1-1 information system is inoperable from within the County telephone system; Information Technology Services is working to correct this situation.

Mental Health

Forensic Counselor Position Request

Mr. DeLuca announced that the groundbreaking on the single-room occupancy project has taken place which will provide 38 beds; it should be completed in approximately one year.

He then spoke of his budget requests for a forensic counselor, providing a history of the position and explained the support expressed by the judges and other individuals who see the value of it. Mr. Whicher spoke of Mr. DeLuca's success at reducing the deficit the Mental Health department has faced, noting that it has been done without the assistance of a Deputy Mental Health Commissioner. The

funding for the Forensic Counselor has been through the absorption of the expense within the department, Mr. Whicher hoped it could continue. Mr. DeLuca said he did not believe the position could continue to be absorbed within the department without additional funding. He said the position would not produce enough revenue to cover the expense, however, he called attention to the County having previously funded the position via the DOORS program at a \$34,000 level. Mr. DeLuca would like to see an increase in the target funding for the position.

Potential Federal Medicaid Reduction Issue for Persons with Disabilities

Mr. DeLuca spoke of the proposed regulatory language that could seriously curtail the ability to provide services in the disabilities community by limiting Medicaid. If the regulation were adopted it would deny federal Medicaid dollars for Day Treatment, Article 16 Clinics and long-term developmental disabilities habilitative therapies in Article 28 clinics. Written information had been provided. Mr. DeLuca said that since the information was initially provided it is believed the President would veto the S-CHIP bill. He wished to make the Committee aware that a good deal of funding comes to New York State from Medicaid for individuals with disabilities and he is concerned that reductions would place the individuals at risk.

Request for substitute at Mental Health Subcommittee

Mr. Shinagawa reported that due to class schedules he is unable to regularly attend the meetings; he would be available again in January.

Health Department Autism Position

Mr. DeLuca indicated that there is a significant growth in autism and recognizes the need for a position such as this. He said that Mr. Sigler's recommended reductions in other areas to provide the position included the Recreation Mainstream program. He clarified that part of the Recreation Mainstream program is in the mental health budget and part is from the City of Ithaca.

Department of Social Services

Prisoner Re-Entry Program

Ms. Carey noted the program is under the purview of the Public Safety Committee, however, since she reports to Health and Human Services Committee she wanted to report on this work her department is undertaking. This program is part of the continuum of care started in 2004. It was noted that there was not adequate discharge planning for inmates being released, which creates situations where there would be a higher recidivism. A review was conducted, showing that ten agencies provide services to individuals being released. During 2006 at the time a new director of Offender Aid and Restoration was hired, the Sheriff, Department of Social Services, Probation, and Offender Aid and Restoration worked together to determine how to assist individuals being released. The Department of Social Services was provided the opportunity to develop a program, including a database was designed to assist in developing statistics regarding the pilot program. Following the pilot program a re-entry program was developed. Information was provided to the Committee to show how inmates scheduled for release have various steps with the different agencies taken to assist in their success. Ms. Carey spoke of Sheriff Department employee Jeff Potter's extensive work in developing components for the program.

Following the presentation members learned how the individuals are chosen and the requirements to continue within the program. The Committee was informed the group is kept small in order to be able to complete the necessary work with each individual. Ms. Carey will continue to provide updates.

Food Stamp Initiative

Ms. Carey reported her department has volunteered to participate in a pilot program for an on-line application process for food stamps. Phase one will provide facilitated enrollers to assist in the process. This is to enable individuals without transportation or with disabilities preventing them from enrolling at the department site to participate in programs. Phase 2 should enable clients to complete the application without assistance. She stated that although confidentiality is always an issue, however, there are many web-based applications available online at this time. In response to Ms. Robertson it was noted that the application process could be frozen for several weeks in order to obtain all necessary information. It is also being developed to allow scanning of documents for submission.

Differential Response – Child Protective Services

Ms. Carey reported her department is participating in a pilot program entitled differential response. When a hotline comes in the department will have the ability to determine whether it is truly an at-risk situation or one that would be better served by family services. If it is determined family services is the better choice, there would not be the need for a full investigation of abuse.

Community Solutions for Transportation Funds

Ms. Carey reported the County was awarded \$70,000 for the Community Solutions for Transportation program.

Computer Upgrade Update

Ms. Carey said there has been activity at the State level regarding the upgrade of computer systems within the department.

Approval of Minutes

It was MOVED by Mr. Proto, seconded by Ms. Robertson, and unanimously approved by voice vote of members, to accept the minutes of September 5, 2007, as amended. MINUTES APPROVED.

Adjournment

On motion the meeting adjourned at 4:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Karen Fuller, Deputy Clerk