

COUNTY OF OSWEGO
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

March 25, 2009

PRESENT:

Jack Proud, Chair
Barbara Brown, Vice Chair
Art Gearsbeck
Margaret Kastler
Doug Malone
Morris Sorbello
Chalifoux

STAFF/GUESTS:

Phil Church, County Administrator
Kathleen Fenlon, Director of Youth Bureau
Donna Kestner, Veterans
Frances Lanigan, Commissioner of Social Services
Dr. Dennis Norfleet, Interim Director of Public Health
Leg. Chm. Leemann and Legs. Santore, Lockwood, LeClair, Daniel
Legs. Flett, Hayes, and Doyle
Larry Schmidt, Aging Services Administrator
Fred Maxon, Purchasing Director
Ted Jerrett, Clerk of the Legislature
Janet Clerkin, Director of Promotion & Tourism
Ed Williamson, Granby Supervisor
Mr. and Mrs. Pringle

MEDIA:

Aaron Curtis, Oswego Palladium Times
C. Thompson, Valley News
Steve Yablonski, Oswego County Today
Jim Kenyon, Channel 3
Andy Mattison, News Channel 10
Tiffany Latino, WSYR Radio
Tanya Babich, Channel 9

Call to Order:

Committee Chair Proud called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

1. Approval of Minutes:

Committee Chair Proud asked for a motion to approve the February 25 and March 12, 2009 minutes.

Motion to Approve: Legislator Kastler

Second: Legislator Malone

Vote: Unanimous

2. Youth Bureau:

A. Bid 7-09 Camp Hollis Swimming Pool

Youth Bureau Director Kathy Fenlon explained the need for repairs to the pool at Camp Hollis. Bids were solicited and the Purchasing Dept. recommends awarding the bid to Design Pool and Spa LTD. of Fairport, NY for \$45,135.

Motion to Approve: Legislator Brown

Second: Legislator Sorbello

Vote: Unanimous

B. Federal Stimulus - AmeriCorps

Director Kathy Fenlon noted that she has applied for \$270,000 in Federal Stimulus Funding available to the AmeriCorps Program. With the funds, a number of worthwhile community projects could be completed at no local cost.

3. Health Department:

A. Capital Project 187 – Defibrillators

Interim Health Director Dr. Norfleet requested a Budget Modification in the amount of \$40,000 to buy 20 Defibrillators for placement throughout county facilities. Leg. Malone said it was a great idea and offered his support. Leg. Kastler asked if the model sought is compatible with

most clientele at county facilities. Dr. Norfleet said that they would be generally compatible. Leg. Sorbello asked if the bid could be accessed by towns and fire departments. The response was “yes”.

Motion to Approve: Leg. Gearsbeck

Second: Leg. Kastler

Vote: Unanimous

B. Board of Health Composition

Dr. Norfleet requested a resolution to conform the composition of the Oswego County Board of Health to State Standards, expressing that the additional requirements placed heretofore by Oswego County make it difficult to recruit qualified members. Leg. Proud attested, as a long standing member of the Board of Health, that the particularly restrictive conditions of Oswego County have been a problem. In response to questions, Dr. Norfleet added that membership would reduce by 2 and members receive no pay.

Motion to Approve Request: Leg. Malone

Second: Leg. Sorbello

Vote: Unanimous

C. Beach Grant Budget Modification

Dr. Norfleet requested a budget modification accepting and appropriating an additional \$1,760 made available through the Beach Grant, which is 100% State funding.

Motion to Approve Request: Leg. Malone

Second: Leg. Brown

Vote: Unanimous

4. Social Services:

A. Budget Modification – Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

Commissioner Lanigan requested a budget modification to accept an additional Federal allocation of \$88,590 for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Motion to Approve Request: Leg. Brown

Second: Leg. Kastler

Vote: Unanimous

Chairman Proud announced that the Oswego County Drug Card Program has, to date, saved participating Oswego County residents \$483,422.37. Leg. Brown noted that the program can also be used to reduce the cost of prescriptions for pets. Aging Administrator Larry Schmidt added that the County Program is more beneficial than the proposed State Card and covers more prescriptions.

A. Follow-up discussion on Child Fatality Report

Chairman Proud reminded everyone that this is a working meeting, that comments from the Committee will be solicited first with subsequent opportunity by other legislators. Chm. Proud offered the floor to Administrator Church, who urged taking the energy of anger and frustration and committing it to productive changes. Mr. Church said he would be documenting today’s suggestions for change and using them to direct future efforts.

Leg. Chm. Leemann offered that the County should study and perhaps emulate the Pulaski Community Model addressing child protection. The group of community stakeholders includes Code Enforcement officials.

Commissioner Lanigan offered that changes in Code Enforcement could be helpful to communities addressing child abuse.

Leg. Malone said he understood that DSS Commissioner Lanigan had offered her resignation and he felt the Legislature should accept it, saying “we need to cut the head off the snake”.

Motion: Leg. Malone to accept resignation of Commissioner Lanigan

Second: Leg Gearsbeck

Leg. Gearsbeck stated that “We need to hold someone accountable.”

Leg. Chalifoux said he felt the motion was out of order, expressing doubt that Commissioner Lanigan had actually offered her resignation and requested the Commissioner to respond.

Commissioner Lanigan clarified that she had **not** offered her resignation.

Leg. Doyle insisted that the Committee needs to seek solutions, not play politics.

Leg. Gearsbeck opined that “DSS has been badly managed for years. It is a bad department with bad management.”

Leg. Brown stated that we all grieve for the loss of Erin Maxwell and she would be better honored by our offering constructive changes. Leg. Brown suggested that better tracking of family connections in homes under investigation could be helpful.

Leg. Kastler recommended clearer language from State DSS on actionable complaints.

Commissioner Lanigan suggested the county address a work load study outlining more adequate staffing at DSS Children and Family Services and ensure funding for compliance. She noted that the current caseload per worker is about 117/yr, well above the recommended 72/year and added that caseworker turnover is about 2/3.

Leg. Malone asked if Commissioner Lanigan had yet explained the State Report to staff. She replied, “yes”.

Responding to the motion to remove Commissioner Lanigan, Deputy County Attorney Christy Carrington noted that the Committee could be subject to litigation if due process is not observed. Due process would exclude any opportunity for a final decision today and any discussion affecting her employment would have to be done in Executive Session.

Motion: Leg. Chalifoux to table the motion on the floor

Second: Leg Sorbello

Vote: All in favor but Malone and Gearsbeck

Leg. Kastler offered that the State needs to be clear if standards for “too dirty” or “too cluttered” are to be enforced.

Leg. LeClair suggested the County consider ways to facilitate reporting of abuse to the State. Administrator Church said he would check with our IT Department for opportunities to quickly transfer calls received by DSS to the State Hotline. Commissioner Lanigan offered that DSS already regularly connects callers to the State Hotline.

Administrator Church suggested heavier marketing of the State Hotline and how it works.

Leg. Doyle proposed that School District Superintendents be asked to join a county-wide task force with other stakeholders to improve the abuse reporting process.

Leg. Malone asked if Administrator Church had yet met with School Superintendents as promised. Mr. Church replied that the meeting has been scheduled and would address cooperative efforts to reduce transportation costs and ways to improve the child protection process.

Leg. Malone stated that DSS personnel need to be courteous and helpful in responding to calls.

Administrator Church noted that some suggestions may require additional funding and that he will report back to the Committee on opportunities to access “Stimulus” funds.

Leg. Gearsbeck suggested county legislators be allowed into the offices of DSS at anytime they decide. Leg. Proud reminded Leg. Gearsbeck that access to DSS offices is always open to legislators upon prior request. The law strictly requires that DSS protect the privacy of its clients and to that end, DSS must necessarily restrict access to the offices.

Commissioner Lanigan offered the following changes made at Oswego DSS that are all above State requirements:

- DSS checking other successful models of child protection
- Regular group review of individual investigations
- Additional training and providing check list for investigations

Leg. LeClair noted that the State should better explain the criteria for “credible and actionable” complaints.

Leg. Malone suggested that meetings of all stakeholders should be held regularly.

Leg. Lockwood suggested that a way be developed for DSS to “red tag” special cases for review after 60 days.

Leg. Leemann recommended review of all laws that handicap DSS caseworkers and others from doing “follow up” on special cases after the usual 60 days.

Committee Chair Proud thanked all for their comments and suggestions and noted that they will be reviewed and considered for future action.

11:55 Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn: Legislator Sorbello

Second: Legislator Brown

Vote: All in favor