

Minutes of Meeting

SOCIAL & MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING Department of Social Services

August 27, 2012

Present: John Salka, Town of Brookfield
Lewis Carinci, City of Oneida
Roger Bradstreet, Town of Nelson
Alexander Stepanski, Town of Stockbridge
James Goldstein, Town of Lebanon
Michael Fitzgerald, Commissioner
Steven Chaires, Deputy Commissioner for Administrative Services
Mark Scimone, Administrative Assistant to the Chairman
Eric Faisst, Director of Public Health

Mike began the meeting by ensuring that the meeting minutes from the July 30, 2012, committee meeting had been delivered and reviewed. On a motion by Alex and seconded by Lewis, the previous month's meeting minutes were approved as written.

Mike next reviewed the caseload and expenditures report. It had totals through the end of July and Mike reported that "all seemed to be in line with expectations." Jim commented that the food stamp (now SNAP) caseload had dipped a bit and Mike explained that it often does seasonally as construction and farm work picks up in the summer. Mike reported that FAR continues to handle about 30 percent of the total CPS reports with good results.

Mike introduced the first resolution, which would modify the adopted 2012 budget, allowing DSS to transfer funds to purchase computer equipment. Mike explained that the first piece of computer equipment was a file server. The current server is "not too old" and could likely be utilized in another department; however, several IT staff and the state have tried to get this model to connect into the DSS network for several years with minimal success. Mike stated that the amount of time and effort put into trying to make this mismatched equipment work exceeds the cost of simply replacing it – which is what would be done. Additionally, with under spent funds in heating/electricity and tuition/education, DSS and IT are proposing to purchase an additional 20 PCs in 2012, thereby eliminating the need for any computer equipment purchases in 2013. On a motion by Jim and seconded by Alex, the resolution to modify the 2012 budget passed unanimously.

Mike introduced two resolutions to contract for services from the CAP agency. The first was for \$72,224 for the period October 1, 2012, to September 30, 2013, from 100 percent federal funding. This represents no increase from previous years. The purpose of the contract is to divert applicants from DSS services where transportation is a barrier. For instance, if a family were applying because they had or were about to lose a job due to car repair costs, CAP would provide funding to get the car on the road and ensure that the wage earner remained employed. There was widespread praise for the work CAP does. Jim asked about how much of the funding is used for actual client needs. Mike explained that through the efforts of Inez DeGroat at DSS and Kim Lorraine at CAP, they were able to double the amount of direct client funds available (for both the transportation grant and a housing grant that was proposed in the following resolution). On a motion by Jim and seconded by Lewis, the resolution passed unanimously.

The second resolution for CAP was for \$108,948, the same amount as previous years, for the period January 1, 2013, to December 31, 2013, from 100 percent federal funds. This contract serves a similar purpose as the previous resolution except that where housing is a factor for a family applying for assistance, DSS and CAP can assist them in the short-term, avoiding long-term dependence and allowing a family to regain some stability. Past-due rent, first month's deposit, utility charges, and the like are examples of payments made. On a motion by Alex and seconded by Roger, the resolution passed unanimously.

Steve distributed the overview of the 2013 DSS budget proposal. In summary, despite increases of \$220,553 in salaries, \$281,198 in fringe benefits, and \$330,553 in Medicaid – a sum totaling over \$840,000 – the DSS local cost increase is proposed at \$291,711. Mike praised Steve for his tireless efforts despite setbacks in getting revenue data and the ever-changing landscape of DSS programs, as he was able to put together a timely and accurate 2013 budget proposal. Mike again commented that much of the offsetting expenses in foster care reductions were the primary reason for a better budget than predicted. Mark asked about the increase or decrease in the .2 (equipment) and .4 (contracts) of the DSS budget with Steve replying that between the two categories, DSS is budgeted to have an increase of about \$9,000. That includes the purchase of two automobiles and a sizable increase in the PINS prevention program through KAG Consulting. Mike estimated that through negotiations, the contract amount would be lowered allowing no increases in the .2 or .4 accounts as a whole. Mike also commented that burial expenses, even with a somewhat modest increase in rates, would see about a 20 percent increase, which also includes additional burials based on current utilization. John accurately pointed out that the foster care reduction is not just about the numbers, but that this is really about children's lives. Mike agreed that foster care is often the least appropriate means for families and that by investing in preventive services, we have seen dramatic improvements in childhood outcomes. Mike commented that it is not often that a nearly \$300,000 increase is seen as a good outcome, but considering the cuts that the state has imposed, the mandates and their costs, and the pressing need for services, this increase was appropriate. It also does not hurt that DSS has had several years of no increases and decreases preceding the 2013 budget proposal. The next step will be presenting the budget to the Budget Committee on Wednesday, September 19, at 2:30.

There being no further agenda items, the committee prepared for the Mental Health Department presentation.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael A. Fitzgerald
Commissioner

Approved by Committee Chairman: _____ Date: _____