



Onondaga County Legislature

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HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE MINUTES – AUGUST 11, 2021 JULIE ABBOTT-KENAN, CHAIR

MEMBERS PRESENT: Dr. Chase, Ms. Cody

MEMBERS ABSENT: Mr. Bush, Mr. Kinne

ALSO ATTENDING: Mrs. Kuhn; also see attached

Chair Abbott-Kenan called the meeting to order at 10:32 a.m. *A motion was made by Dr. Chase, seconded by Ms. Cody to waive the reading and approve the minutes of the previous committee meeting. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED. A motion was made by Dr. Chase, seconded by Ms. Cody to approve the previous committee meeting minutes. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED*

1. **SOCIAL SERVICES – ECONOMIC SECURITY:** Sarah Merrick, Commissioner

a. **Authorizing an Intermunicipal Agreement with the City of Syracuse for Administration of the City of Syracuse's American Rescue Plan Act Funds to Help Expand the Population Served through the Onondaga County Emergency Rental Assistance Program (OCERA) (\$1,000,000)**

- Last year and a half, there are various different funding sources all doing the same thing
- Trying to assist tenants who are unable to pay their rent during the pandemic
- Various HUD funds were coming forward to the city; city asked DSS to administer the funds
- \$1 mil - city received through the American Rescue Plan Act
- ~\$25 million dollars' worth of US Treasury funds moving through the system
- Asking county to accept this and assist renters at the income level of 81% to 100% of area median income
- All previous funds, including US Treasury Funds, the max income a household could have is 80% of the area median income; this helps slightly higher income, but still an income group having difficulty paying their rent
- Current rental assistance program launched end of April 2021
- 826 payments; \$4.7 million dollars or 18% of funds out the door
- Treasury requires county to look at tenant income, verify it, as well as necessary documentation from the landlord before a check can be issued
- Received ~7,000 applications; feeling positive; getting the money out quicker
- CDC moratorium on evictions through October 3rd; county subject to this; HUD grants on hold
- Tenant has to have eviction notice in hand

Ms. Cody said a constituent of hers owns rental property with tenants who owe \$3,000 in back rent and are moving. She is not expecting the money to come from them, and Ms. Cody asked if this constituent would process a request through the county. Ms. Merrick responded:

- Yes, the tenant has to be eligible; if the tenant's residence is in Onondaga County, then the tenant and landlord have to go through the Onondaga County program; most other counties are working through the state program
- There are many applications where the tenants have left; if county able to verify the income level of the tenant, or previous tenant, and they are eligible, then the landlord is paid rental arrears

Ms. Cody asked if it is a separate application, and Ms. Merrick replied no; same application.

Dr. Chase asked what 80% equates to. Ms. Merrick believes it is around \$65,000 for a family of four, but she will get Dr. Chase a chart for accuracy.

A motion was made by Dr. Chase, seconded by Ms. Cody, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.

b. INFORMATIONAL: Budget Update

- Area where the budget fluctuates the most is the temporary assistance area; due to the moratorium on evictions, seeing all-time lows in case loads
- Moratorium does not mean people do not have to pay rent; former temporary assistance clients and vast majority of temporary assistance goes to paying rent
- The idea that people do not have to pay rent, makes them believe they do not have to do what is required for their temporary assistance case
- Will have an explosion of people coming back once moratorium is lifted, and they get an eviction notice
- Everything else in the budget is steady and within funding levels

Chair Abbott-Kenan asked if there is any way to communicate this. Ms. Merrick responded:

- Yes, have tried through the Emergency Rental Program; have a website just with the program and have been working with a marketing firm that have been getting Facebook posts out to the target audience
- Keep saying “moratorium does not mean you do not pay rent”
- If they could get the message out, and tenants started working with their landlords (even paying \$50), it would go a long way to prevent the landlord moving to eviction court when the courts are open

Ms. Cody stated that it would be helpful if legislators could get that posting and share it on our social media. Ms. Merrick responded that she will send along the posting. Talked to colleagues across the state and it is happening everywhere. Hopefully they can prevent evictions, otherwise the fallout is homelessness.

2. HEALTH DEPARTMENT: Dr. Indu Gupta, Commissioner

a. INFORMATIONAL: COVID Update

- June 27th had 6 cases; seeing death variant in India causing chaos; lost extended family members who got sick
- Matter of time before it came here; in May the delta variant was 1 - 2% of cases, now its 90%
- First week of August, county was okay, but now in high concentration zone
- (1) Delta Variant; (2) surge of cases; (3) what happens now, including testing
- (1) Delta variant – virus continues to change itself into something different if it wants to survive; when virus enters body, it makes billions and trillions of copies; it is equipped with things it knows can do harm
- Any time any virus replicates, there will be defects (genome sequence); viruses can become weaker or more serious
- Variants of concern – Kappa, Beta (Africa), Gamma (Japan and Brazil), Delta (India); Lambda variant – not being discussed, but started in early 2020; spread to 30 countries - highly infectious, transmits faster
- Vaccines are still effective; people are getting infection, but are recovering; small percentage in the hospital
- The more opportunity people give to replicate the virus, the more it has the chance to create the more effective virus
- The more people that get vaccinated, it creates a wall; many unvaccinated people gives the virus a chance to replicate and create more mutations
- Mask is an effective tool to prevent transmission; seen again and again that people did not get infected with masks
- Changing the rules in schools – did not see the kids getting infected because they were wearing masks
- Masks create protection, like vaccine; consider putting mask on in indoor settings even if vaccinated
- Obligation to protect children that cannot get the vaccine
- (2) Surge of cases – June 27th 6 cases; June 28th 30 cases; Aug 1st 62 cases; Aug 7th 90 cases; Aug 10th 41 cases
- If someone has a sniffle or cold, do not underestimate it; get tested; if there are symptoms, go for the PCR test
- Do not do antigen test – screening at this point; most for asymptomatic; with symptoms, do not get this test
- Spreading the infection is the worst thing to do for the variant
- Dec. 28th had 315 cases; Aug. 10th is 30 cases; if people do not take proactive action, then county may go back in time

- Use tools available: testing, isolate, quarantine family, mask, vaccination
- 70 – 90 year olds are most compliant with vaccination; younger people think they are invincible and transmit the virus
- No current time frame for vaccination to be approved for the younger kids
- If test positive, have to isolate for 10 days; vaccinated people do not quarantine, ask for history and how close of contact
- If positive and close contact, have high probability of transmission; if asymptomatic, contact and vaccinated, recommended to get a PCR test in 3-5 days; recommend to wear a mask for 14 days inside or in public
- Not in close contact and asymptomatic, then just watch for symptoms; if symptomatic days later after exposure, then get tested and have to be negative; not quarantine, but need the testing
- Schools – state will provide guidance only; spoke with schools in detail regarding testing, and highly recommend them get CDC school guidance; put plan together
- How to create a safe environment – recommend masks, testing to be implemented (PCR), CDC school guidance
- Pandemic has brought community together; more communication between everyone
- Cleaning once a day is recommended; goal to have kids in school with in person learning; not remote

Chair Abbott-Kenan asked if an entire classroom of kids will be guaranteed if there is a COVID case where all the kids are wearing masks and distanced three feet apart (but are not vaccinated due to age). Dr. Gupta responded no; they continue to learn what they should do. Sports rules will remain the same with testing. They will have pool testing available.

Dr. Chase asked if they are doing popup clinics for the vaccine. Dr. Gupta replied they have been doing them since the beginning, and they have had requests to do popups. Most places they have been able to make work for a popup clinic, as long as there is vaccine integrity and a tent (or covering) depending on the weather. Wegmans has been a great partner helping with popups. Dr. Gupta stated prevention is better than any cure.

Ms. Cody asked about the data on the types of vaccines. Dr. Gupta answered that there is Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson and Johnson. Pfizer has the most popular vaccine, but the county started with Moderna. Those that received any of the vaccines who got COVID, had minimal symptoms. Nothing supports one being more susceptible. Dr. Gupta talked about the Health Department's website (ongov.net/health) which has links to information regarding vaccines, clinics, and COVID.

Ms. Kuhn asked if the cases are broken down by vaccinated versus unvaccinated. Dr. Gupta responded the numbers are based on the positives. They do have the break down which ranges between 30% - 60% of positive cases being vaccinated people. 50% - 70% are mild symptoms, and the rest are asymptomatic; the vaccine does provide protection. People who are vaccinated can still transmit the virus, so masks will help prevent the transmission.

Ms. Cody asked if they are recommending those that have already had COVID and built antibodies get the vaccine, because they may get it again. Dr. Gupta responded yes; there may be protection for three months, but they will still need the vaccine.

A motion was made by Ms. Cody, seconded by Dr. Chase, to adjourn the meeting. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.

ATTENDANCE

The meeting was adjourned at 11:33 a.m.

COMMITTEE: **HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE**
DATE: **AUGUST 11, 2021**

Respectfully submitted,



DEBBIE KAMINSKI, Assistant Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature

NAME (Please Print)	DEPARTMENT/AGENCY
Sarah Myrick	DSS-ES
Yvetta Velasco	Law
Teneshia Murphy	CE ofc.
Ann Rooney	CE
DR. Gupta	HHH