



Onondaga County Legislature

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HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE MINUTES – SEPTEMBER 14, 2021 JULIE ABBOTT-KENAN, CHAIR

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mrs. Abbott-Kenan, Dr. Chase, Ms. Cody, Mr. Bush, Mr. Kinne

ALSO ATTENDING: Mr. Knapp, Mrs. Ervin, Mr. Meyer, Ms. Velasco, Ms. Spoto Decker, Ms. Mancilla, Ms. Meili, Ms. Mahar, Mr. Smorol, Dr. Gupta, Ms. Vilardi, Mr. DeSantis, Ryan Frantzis

Chair Abbott-Kenan called the meeting to order at 10:35 p.m. *A motion was made by Dr. Chase, seconded by Mr. Bush to waive the reading of the minutes. A motion was made by Dr. Chase, seconded by Mr. Kinne to approve the minutes of the previous committee meeting. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.*

1. **HEALTH:** Dr. Indu Gupta, M.D., M.P.H., Commissioner

- a. Amending the 2021 County Budget to Make Funding Available for use in Connection with a Grant from the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH), and Authorizing the Execution of Agreements (\$11,046,875)

Dr. Gupta:

- Asking to accept fed funds which have been passed through the State – this fund is awarded only to do school testing – COVID continues to impact our lives – specific ask to do surveillance testing of schools – random testing of asymptomatic testing – however if symptoms nurse can test – process initiated with schools – went through RFP process
- Answered Dr. Chase’s question - Can this be used by all schools – yes every school – private, public and BOCES– zoom meetings are held weekly with school superintendents – June 27 there was 1 case now 150–200 cases per day – heightened interest – part of the preparedness every county in NYS was awarded money
- What % will this cover – will each school district have a cost for testing – OC is one of the sources for testing – this funding has empowered the health department to do a gold standard test – schools have opportunity to participate in other testing services – affinity works with schools to do PCR tests – no costs to schools – OC has encouraged schools to look into this – NYS Department of Health – encouraged schools to be certified for testing – OC is certified because of the license held by NYS Department of Health – schools can’t test on their own – currently working under OC’s certification – has limitations – NYS is encouraging schools to get a license – schools ask for a waiver to do testing – they could get binex testing directly from the state
- 3 sources – surveillance testing, directly involved with state lab and affinity – 70-80K population of the school districts in OC
- Improved testing for people – pharmacies, urgent cares – plenty of testing sights
- Tests you can buy in drug stores – binex test – comes in packs of 2 for home testing – people don’t report positives – OC has no way of telling – if they report they still have to go to a OC test sight – quarantine is a legal document so must have a validated test

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

- b. Amending the 2021 County Budget to Make Funding Available for use in Connection with a Grant from the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) for the Establishment of the New York State Public Health Corps (NYSPHC) Fellowship Program, and Authorizing the Execution of Agreements (\$5,859,670)

Dr. Gupta:

- Up to \$5,859,670 – don't automatically get the full amount – shift was toward health care from public care – improve public health infrastructure to combat viruses – they can have a fully funded fellows that will get training through Cornell University and can be placed in various health departments throughout NYS – would be fully funded based on the needs of the community
- Should provide an opportunity for OC to find staffing needs for a certain area – can be used for any public health needs – haven't received any money as of yet – will go through resumes to find people – if successful how does it impact the work of the health department – depending on success then figure out how to pay for these programs –
- What areas are you thinking JAK – data analyst staff, public health educators, - any preventative measures which will impact long term – healthy eating of healthy foods – increased life by 20 years – COVID has washed away this

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

- c. Authorizing Advance Step Placements

Dr. Gupta:

- Now asking for support – people make it financial – same is true for physicians – medical examiner's office is struggling – very hot market – less workers and high demand – salaries are very high – because of our low cost of living we can entice people – Dr. Thompson is a fresh graduate – they see big dollars and go somewhere else – a seasoned employee can go up to three steps with CE approval – more than three steps have to come to Legislators – when pathologist do autopsy if they are contracted cases the pathologists don't want to touch them – if there is any type of legal complications they stay away – excessive work can't be handled – asking to go to step up to \$207K – steward of the County money and treat it as her own – taxpayer herself – look at pros and cons
- Looking for advancement to step 12 formally known as R – the timing takes so long through the process so we may lose people
- We are lucky to have a medical director and infectious disease doctor – he is the keeper of those and continues to guide Dr. Gupta – would like to find someone like him – unique combination – medical director will lead beyond pandemic – people look at salaries in addition to the work
- Answered Mrs. Abbott-Kenan's question regarding the need to fill pathologists in order to maintain accreditation – yes, they do work for the DA's office – gives a higher level of respect

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

2. INFORMATIONAL: Shape Up for Veterans; Bill Meyer, Cicero Town Supervisor

Mr. Meyer:

- Feel honored to be on the agenda with Veterans Service Agency – it's not a job for them but a passion
- Complex issue – younger veterans with major issues trying to get housing – and older veterans trying to get housing
- 17,000 in OC with veteran exemption for property taxes – 7,500 also have income exemption – less than \$38k
- Knock on door approach to meet these people – financial status developed over time – as long as two were making money life was ok – but when it went to one income they went to home equity and reverse mortgages – have isolation issues
- Learned you could have an ok looking exterior of a house but interior problems – heating with stove, broken sump pump – may have been in hospital for minor injury and then hospital doesn't let them go back
- Went to Supervisors meetings to spread the word about these great programs
- City of Syracuse has a program for housing

- Reached out to CE McMahon to set up a housing program – set up a model to go to Katko and Schumer – put in the first dollar – have skin in the game – included the VA to invest
- If viewed as social services vs veterans program – more positive if it is a veterans’ program – totally changes their outlook
- .75% of population have worn the uniform – they look at things differently
- If we can keep them in their house as long as possible will make resident happy
- Answered Mr. Kinne’s question - will this give us enough sample time or should it be a 2-3 year program - trying to be realistic starter – very modest– feel if Schumer and Katko see a highly successful program they will want to be in the game
- Open to all towns in OC – makes the towns a partner – every community gets involved – people are more receptive if it’s in their community – have a speaker come from Community Development and Veterans Service
- Answered Dr. Chase’s question - who will administer this program – talked to many towns and villages about administering this program – all allotted money would be actual money used for helping veterans because we already have an administrative structure – may need to add people as the program expands
- 17,000 seems low because it doesn’t count those in an apartment or facility – probably 28-30k veterans in OC

Dr. Cody:

- We have the shape up now for 62 and older and/or disabled – up to \$15k – this would be in conjunction – dd14 are the only requirements – Community Development money over the years has decreased – all rules would stay the same

Mr. Bush:

- Initial funding would be American Rescue Funding – program would run until those funds ran out – bureaucracy is already in place – sounds very simplistic

Mrs. Abbott-Kenan:

- Risk is always sustainability – appreciate the honesty – demonstrate you are investing and the Feds like it

Dr. Chase:

- If they are not bought in how long before we are willing to know if feds will buy in – answer confident in the persuasiveness of this body to reach out to Schumer

Mr. Bush:

- Valid use of money that came from American rescue funds – what are you estimating - answered \$1m taking out 25% for admin costs – maybe able to decrease the % - goal is to keep 50 folks out of long term facilities – stabilize neighborhoods, keep folks in their homes

Mr. Kinne:

- Would like to hope that entire Leg would endorse this program

3. **VETERANS SERVICE AGENCY:** Anne-Marie Mancilla, Director

a. INFORMATIONAL: 2021 Budget update

Ms. Mancilla:

- The mission of OCVSA is to assist veterans, military personnel, and their families apply for local, state or federal benefits they may be eligible for. To provide information, assistance and advocacy for claimants in actions or claims against the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) or state and local veterans-related entitlements to include burial assistance.
- Our mission has been directly impacted by The Pandemic. In 2019 we processed 656 new claims, in addition to our on-going case load. In 2020, we processed 206 new claims and in 2021, to date, we have 42 new claims. We receive a multitude of calls requiring assistance for claims that were previously denied, or asking for assistance with an active claim that we did not initiate. These claims require more research and time and are not included in the above claim count.

- The VSA has recently absorbed the responsibility of attending in-person and virtual hearings for veterans in Onondaga County who have ever signed a POA with The American Legion. This is a huge addition to our existing workload as we have to represent these veterans and be prepared with the facts of their claim. Some claims we have never been involved with and have been processing for several years. This delegation of responsibility has shifted due to a staff shortage at The Regional Office in Buffalo.
- Effective January 2021, Cindy Meili was appointed as Assistant Director for The VSA. Cindy is a military spouse and traditionally only veterans were able to fill these positions. Cindy is also now a fully accredited Veteran Service Officer and can process claims.
- We currently have four full-time positions; one Director, one Assistant Director, one full-time Veteran Service Officer and one Information Aide (vacant).
- The VSA has requested to have a previously funded full-time Veteran Service Officer position added back into our budget. We will fill this provisionally until the next VSO Civil Service exam is scheduled.
- We have reviewed our contracts with Clear Path for Veterans and Syracuse University Veterans Law Clinic. Both agencies are a large presence in our community and support our outreach efforts.
- The VSA had a key role in coordinating a Virtual Veteran's Day in November 2020, the Memorial Day Ceremony in May 2021 and the Gordy Lane Chapel Dedication at Onondaga County's Veterans Memorial Cemetery in August 2021. We are also actively assisting with The Veterans Day Ceremony on 11/11/2021 at The War Memorial.
- The passing of Local Law 01-2019 Waiving the Burial Fee for Veterans and their dependents directly lead to a 71% increase in pre-need burial applications through 2021. To date, we have reimbursed the community \$592,140.
- Cost containment initiatives enacted by the VSA include identifying Indigent Veteran Spouse burial costs *not previously collected*. We have now established a process to collect these DSS-NYS reimbursements quarterly. In 2021, we are up-to-date on these reimbursements.
- The VSA also continues to seek reimbursement from The Department of Veterans Affairs, when applicable, and NYS Division of Veterans Services for Indigent Veteran Burials. In regards to revenue enhancement, in 2021 we have approved 21 Indigent Burial applications at \$50, 157.00. Our efforts continue daily to recoup from all funding sources.
- Cindy Meili was voted as NY National Guard Military Spouse of the Year and recently traveled to DC to discuss policy changes that will directly impact our military and veteran community.
- Cindy has a voice in policy changes to include advocating for a bill that expands the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) to include the hiring of a qualified military spouse.
- There is currently no federal funding directly available for CVSOs. CVSOs are responsible for helping veterans obtain more than \$50 billion annually in federal health, disability, and pension and compensation benefits. Cindy is working directly with congressional members to help pass the CVSO Act which will allow Federal funds to help support our mission by funding more CVSO positions on the local level.
- 2020 206 new claims – VA would not allow offices to work remotely – all those submitted need to be corrected – work load has not gone down – still working on denied claims – don't have a tracking system for taking on already submitted claims
- Some take years of research – shift work has changed from the Regional offices –
- Effective January 2021 – Cindy is a military spouse – fully accredited - 4 fulltime and one information aid that is vacant at this time – fill provisional until test is administered
- VSA was key in the organization of the ceremony on November 11 at the War Memorial – 71% increase in applications \$591k reimbursement – recouped from all funding sources – Cindy Meile was voted spouse of the year – no federal funding for county – federal disability members for CSO on a local level
- Cindy was voted National spouse of the year
- Answered Mrs. Abbott-Kenan question is information aid similar to a clerk – yes, able to now fill it and have two resumes on her desk – hoping to get onboard within next two months
- Acknowledged Mr. Bush's compliment on organization of Memorial day at a last minute notice – team effort with OC Parks department
- Looking to do in person for Veterans day
- Current staff is three people – all three can process claims – pandemic brings in other needs – a lot coming into office – want to build up sustainable staffing – want to be sure the person stays – at one point it was an office of six – the need is there – sustainability lacking due to not proper training and getting frustrated – training with DAV accredited officer placed at the VA – Cayuga County just lost a director

Ms. Meile:

- Started as Elbridge and Skaneateles veteran outreach – develop policies and procedures for towns and villages - have at least one coordinator in each town and village - need boots on the ground – VA paperwork and they back off – she does home visits – about 15 claims per month – they need money for medication – need support for Town Supervisors
- Also appointed to family advisory board with National spouse of the year – allows her to advocate for our area
- Was a veteran outreach person – active duty family – came from Air Force base where there were services - was getting paid \$15 per hour for 10 hours a week

Ms. Mancilla:

- Can go back to 1985 for these benefits – yesterday a gentlemen received \$35k in back pay

Mr. Bush:

- Want to make sure others realize these benefits are available in the city

4. **ADULT & LONG TERM CARE:** JoAnne Spoto Decker, Commissioner

a. **INFORMATIONAL:** 2021 Budget update

Ms. Spoto Decker:

- Good morning Legislator Abbott-Keenan and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. Thank you for inviting Adult and Long Term Care Services here this morning. I am joined by our Deputy Commissioner, Maria Mahar.
- It's our pleasure to review 2021 with you today. Although we are small in staff numbers, we are honored to serve a large demographic in our county. With an estimated 20% of our population age 60 and older, the Office for Aging consistently, and appropriately, responds to meet the diversity of needs of older adults, and their caregivers, who call Onondaga County their home.
- The first unit we're reporting on is the Office for Aging or OFA. This unit offers services, to meet the vast needs of older adults and caregivers, which can be found no other place in our Community. Nutrition Services offers meals through our Senior Dining and Home Delivered Meal Programs as well as Nutrition counseling. Personal care is provided through our Expanded In-Home Services for the Elderly Program. We also provide unbiased counseling on Medicare Options, HEAP assistance, Transportation and help accessing other income stretching programs, respite care, caregiver support groups, and multiple other services.
- We believe that a community-based approach to service delivery helps us broaden our reach and ensures equity in access to our services. As a result, more than 70% of our Office for Aging budget is subcontracted to Community Based Organization's and Minority & Women Business Enterprises.
- We are pleased to report that the Office for Aging unit is on-track for expenditures for 2021 and do not foresee any fiscal concerns for the remainder of the year. That is also anticipated for 2022.
- The next unit is New York Connects. This unit provides information and assistance on long term care services and supports to people of any age. We offer person-centered options counseling on a variety of long-term care programs. Very often, when one thinks about long-term care, they think older adults in nursing homes but what happens in NY Connects, every day, is beyond the conventional thinking.
- We work with children in Medicaid Waivers, young adults who need services from OPWDD, and much more. Very often, we are able to refer intra-departmentally, to OFA, APS and Long Term Care Resource Center for their assistance. In addition, we have a strong relationship with the Veterans Service Agency, where NY Connects makes referrals and vice-versa.
- NY Connects also works closely with ARISE, Inc. (for persons with disabilities) and DSS-ES, to help solidify a local approach in service to those who need long term care services and supports.
- There are no local dollars in the NY Connects budget. We are pleased to say that, for several years, Onondaga County NY Connects has received the highest appropriation from New York State Office for Aging other than NYC. That includes the other "Big 5", Erie, Monroe, Westchester and Suffolk and Onondaga Counties. The grant amount for 2021/22 (4/1/21-3/31/22) is \$668,436. The majority of the budget is salary. We are pleased to report that our NY Connects unit is on track for expenditures for 2021/22 and do not anticipate any fiscal concerns for the remainder of the program year.

- Our next unit, Adult Protective Services (APS), a New York State (and nationally) mandated program, is offered in every county with the goal of keeping vulnerable adults age 18 and older safely residing in the community or the least restrictive alternative.
- Adult Protective Services is unlike Children Protective Services. With children, they can be removed and a legal hearing will follow. With adults 18 and older, the legal standard is that they have a right to self-determination, unless otherwise decided by a court decision.
- APS caseworkers continued to make home visits, during the pandemic, with proper PPE provided by the county. Through “porch visits”, “fact-time” and face-to-face (masked), APS carried on the mandates of monthly in-person visits and also made intra-departmental referrals for Senior Shopper Service, Transportation, Home Delivered Meals, Pantry boxes, etc. During the height of the pandemic, Guardianship appearances and POA and Trust matters for APS were done via zoom, totaling 48 and 15 respectively. Today, we are responsible for 55 open guardianships granted by the Courts.
- In the first week of August this year, referrals to APS were up 72% compared to the first week of 2020. Looking forward to 2022, we are focused on partnering with DSS-ES in assisting those most vulnerable in need of our services.
- Adult Protective Services funding consists of Medicaid reimbursement and local dollars and is included in the operating budget. The majority of the funding is for salaries. At this time we do not anticipate any fiscal concerns for the remainder of the program year.
- Our final unit is the Long Term Care Resource Center. This unit provides medically-based services to persons with disabilities, of any age, participating in the Medicaid program. Our staff works closely with Fiscal Intermediaries for the Consumer Directed Personal Care Program and with licensed agencies for the Personal Care Program. Our BSN Community Health Nurses also provide assessments for persons in the community that need to have a higher level of care to meet their needs.
- Staff administers the Patient Review Instrument (PRI) as the best-practice assessment. During the height of the pandemic, with the permission of DOH, our staff was completing the PRI’s telephonically in order to assist patients and families to expedite proper long term care placement.
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- In our continuing effort to maximize our services, the Nurses accompany APS caseworkers on home visits that may require legal intervention and need professional testimony from our nursing staff.
- The Long Term Care Resource Center funding is 100% Medicaid reimbursed. The majority of the funding is for salaries, with mileage reimbursement. For 2021, we do not anticipate any fiscal concerns for the remainder of the program year.
- Now we would like to briefly discuss our Programmatic Accomplishments and initiatives for 2021....

Mr. Kinne:

- Would you please provide a chart showing employees

Ms. Spoto Decker:

- Staff was deployed to manage vaccine and test sites – proud to help the County with nurses and staff working at the On Center – Maria Mahar managed the testing site – more than 700 tests in a day – snap shot in humanity – worked on weekends, holidays and evenings – greatest accomplishment to give back

Maria Mahar

- Summarize the past year – pivoted – delivered frozen meals – never once closed – now pivoting back to delivering hot meals at home delivered meal sites – opened 20 senior centers past August with consulting Dr. Gupta – have to be vaccinated and go through screening – received passionate calls to get senior centers open – some adopted spiders as their pets – so happy to see each other and eat a hot meal
- Isolation may lead to depression – doing telehealth which is 50% increase – more people in city, minorities and low income can connect through technology – will assess this next year about the levels of technology – connect to families and doctors – learned from pandemic and will move forward to make

Mrs. Ervin:

- Do you have enough staff to do what you're doing – want to be sure you have the people you need – answer from Ms. Spoto Decker - brought on five county employees since last year – four are on the grant side and one case worker in adult protective services – promoted a caseworker to a supervisor - still have positions open that we are looking to fill on the grant side

Ms. Mahar:

- Food service sights are struggling with finding workers because no one wants to be a sight manager

Bush

- Is there a resolution to vote on with Mr. Meyers – answer no resolution at this time – only informational at this time

***A motion was made by Dr. Chase, seconded by Mr. Kinne to adjourn the meeting. Passed unanimously;
MOTION CARRIED***

The meeting was adjourned at 12:12 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

MELANIE VILARDI, Deputy Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature

ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE: **HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE**

DATE: **SEPTEMBER 14, 2021**

NAME (Please Print)	DEPARTMENT/AGENCY
Bill Meyer	Town of Cicero
Yvette Law	LAW
Jane Spoto Decker	ALTCES
Jannemarie manulla	USA
Cindy Meli	USA
Maria Mahar	ALTCES
Steve Smorol	Fin Ops
Indu Gupta	OCMD