



Onondaga County Legislature

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WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE REVIEW OF THE 2021 TENTATIVE BUDGET HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE DEPARTMENTS – NOVEMBER 12, 2020 TIM BURTIS, CHAIRMAN

OFFICE OF THE CLERK

November 30, 2020

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. May, Mr. Rowley, Mr. Ryan, Mr. Jordan, Mr. Williams, Mrs. Ervin
ALSO ATTENDING: Chairman Knapp, Ms. Cody, Ms. Abbott-Kenan, Ms. Kuhn, Dr. Chase, Mr. Holmquist, Mr. McBride, Mr. Bush, Please see attached

Chair Burtis called the meeting to order at **9:02 a.m.** He pointed out the room exits, asked everyone in attendance to sign in, and for speakers to use their microphones.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES – ECONOMIC SECURITY: (4-60) Sarah Merrick, Commissioner

Ms. Merrick:

- Highlight program activities and trends which are incorporated in the budget for 2021
- Met the pro forma goals given to the Department
- 100% mandated – program areas were untouched – meet budget pro forma through travel, staffing, supply and contract reductions
- Huge shout out to DSS employees – never closed because essential Department
- Went from 100% onsite to at times 80% offsite – staff stepped up and learned how to work remotely
- Centralized activities on the second floor – keep clients and employees safe
- Peak of pandemic seeing about 50 cases per day – now up to 200 – prior pandemic 600-1,000 – State waiver still allowing work to be done via phone except for emergencies have to be handled face to face
- SNAP program has two peaks of activities – totally impacted by unemployment – as unemployment increase SNAP increases
- Case load exceeded last year by the end of October; up more than 700 cases
- Temporary Assistance known as cash benefits – down across the State because of moratorium on evictions; case load decreased by 300
- Concerns when moratorium is lifted - will not be able to serve these clients unless they pay some of the rent – unfortunately message is out that moratorium means you don't have to pay your rent
- Expecting a huge surge in activity; now lucky because homeless shelters have low occupancy
- Expectation with Biden the refugee resettlement program will start again – there was a 66% reduction over the past four years directly related to Federal government
- Monica Brown, Natalie Gallagher and Kristen Thorne helped to quarantine 71 homeless and kept COVID out of mass shelters
- Without CE leadership Childcare would not have survived pandemic as well as it did – CE agreed to apply for State waivers – also able to elevate eligibility level – waiver still in effect
- \$1M increase in Childcare line – subsidies not as high as January but anticipating more will need childcare as employment increases; family of three was at \$58k – same family group now at \$68
- State said open up Medicaid cases without cursory review – resulted in 200 more cases – anticipating work will increase once State requires relooking at open cases
- Federal government gave relief as shown in budget information
- Handle 32K child support cases – COVID benefit saw a surge in child support payments

- Pilot for early child improvement program – training 33 childcare teachers – see benefits with retention
- Creative curriculum usage shows improvement in speech, social and emotional development – daily use of materials shows improvement

Mr. Rowley:

- \$5M request to FEMA – any cost reimbursements for this Department?

Mr. Morgan:

- Hopeful the childcare will be eligible but unknown at this time – not shown in this budget – all are encapsulated in a project set up to track costs – revenue from FEMA will offset this expense – hope that FEMA reimbursement will reduce the local amount – it's a project not a Department
- More costs will be incurred into next year

Mr. Rowley:

- Reduction in grants is recurring theme – have you been told specifically or just your estimate with grants?
- Any new initiatives for expense reductions?
- 350 filled position as of now?

Ms. Merrick:

- Been told 20% reduction
- Maxed out database development; use of kiosk is increasing; looking at possible phone system improvements
- All major investments in technology have been made
- About 345 filled positions

Mrs. Ervin:

- Thanked Ms. Merrick and her Department - received calls during the pandemic – testament that working remotely went well
- Any help coming from the State?

Ms. Merrick:

- State lifting eviction will be the biggest concern – fear is that we have 2,500 on waiting list for ESG and Community Development block grant funds
- Can't use ESG until an eviction notice and have to qualify – a lot of people may have not paid any rent which would not allow them to qualify
- No relief from Federal or State for those that haven't paid any rent – significant disruption in our community

Dr. Chase:

- Breakdown on positions – any part that you have lost more people or are most cross trained?

Ms. Merrick:

- Not cross trained; running a lot of overtime to meet requirements - peak activities are with SNAP and HEAP – can quickly train in Medicaid or child support – Temporary assistance is more difficult to train, takes two years for people to learn, may have to bring back transferred employees
- 29 employees took early retirement – each program area took a 10% hit
- Trying to work with what we have – employees really stepped up

Mr. Burtis:

- What is the impact with Contractual expenses down \$600K?
- How many management employees are working from home?

Ms. Merrick:

- Trimmed and/or eliminated agencies that Onondaga County supported related to poverty

- Priority was to preserve mandated employment contracts and child support; hope to support these programs in future years
- All hourly except six management and confidential employees in Department; management may work from home 1-2 days a week depending on schedule
- 60-70% taking advantage of telework program put in place in September
- Psychological impact of COVID has hit everyone – working from home helps emotional state and maintain production

Mrs. Abbott-Kenan:

- Thank you for responding to employees' mental health
- Prior to pandemic she presented on the state on Medicaid – status?

Ms. Merrick:

- Federal government has stepped up with \$6M of relief
- Implemented cost savings work – State is having them review paperwork for home care
- Reviewing applications for home care – now have to do a 5 year look back for nursing home and home care – from a management perspective this may cause an increase in workload

DEPARTMENT OF ADULT & LONG TERM CARE SERVICES: (4-71) Lisa Alford, Commissioner; JoAnne Spoto Decker, Deputy Commissioner

Ms. Alford:

- Operating budget decreased by \$20,776,941 primarily due to the transfer of expenses to Veterans and Children and Family Services
- Adjustments for Adult Protective include reducing personnel by four positions, adjusting the estimate for Domestic Violence Services due to NYS regulation changes by \$800K and reducing contracts by \$65K for the Outbound Transportation program, \$37K for Catholic Charities and \$84K for Vera House Services
- Primary adjustment for the Resource Center is the reduction of four positions
- Revenues show a \$17,700,849 reduction primarily due to the transfer of expenses to CFS and Veterans
- Reduction of \$1.2M due to the decreased expenses in Adult Protective and the Resource Center

Dr. Chase:

- Disturbed by the cuts – who is picking up the work that has been funded by the County in past years? Scary time to be cutting support
- Catholic charity provides housing which will be needed when evictions start
- Staffing - how does that look – how many lost to retirement?
- Agency funding and staffing has been cut for much needed services

Ms. Alford:

- Certainly aware of the high needs of clients – working to do all we can to meet mandated requirements
- Three to four staff retired recently – Resource center reduced by four positions in Long Term care services – Adult Protective services reduced by two case workers, one senior case worker and a Supervisor B; 19 staff left in Adult Protective services area
- Change in NYS Domestic Violence regulation that requires less information gathering – estimated high in first year and now after seeing a year we have a better estimate

Mrs. Abbott-Kenan:

- Publically thank Heather Taylor and Nick Stepian, Adult Protective case workers that were recognized by the State Office of Children and Family Services for their awesome work

Mrs. Ervin:

- Thanks for all that you do – part of your Department is moving which is reflected in your budget
- Will the remaining budget provide you enough to provide services
- Jo Ann is fabulous and thanks

Ms. Alford:

- Providing basic mandated services
- JoAnn's grant writing provided a NYS Transportation grant

Mr. Bush:

- Three Senior Centers in District 13 were well served– rose to the occasion everyday – touched the human side
- You, your assistant and staff deserve a lot of credit

Mr. Burtis:

- Impact of \$800K reduction in professional services

Mr. Morgan:

- 2019 actual was \$64K
- 2020 budget moved \$1M from DSS to LT care – State was changing how the clients in need of domestic violence shelter apply; historically had to submit application through DSS; State removed this requirement and redirected these funds
- Holding \$200K because experiencing families going in to shelters are still supplying information

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES: (4-78) Richard Gasiorowski, Commissioner; Amy Cunningham, Deputy Commissioner

Mr. Gasiorowski:

- 2021 budget meets pro forma guidelines set forth by the budget office
- Budget supports Child Welfare, Juvenile Justice, School Based Initiatives, Youth Bureau and Mental Health
- Line item increases attributed to the rise in population of Raise the Age youth in Juvenile Justice; an increase in foster care costs within Child Welfare and the realignment of Mental Health Services from Adult and Long Term Care to Department of Children and Family Services
- 2020 plans included continuation of work in child welfare, expansion of our detention center, increasing services and supports in our schools and continuing the overall work of the Department to help children and families in our community thrive
- During COVID quickly pivoted to support our community in a new way; worked closely with County leadership and partner Agencies; continue providing critical and mandated services while expanding ability to help keep staff safe and provide basic needs
- Truly humbling to lead an Agency and work with partner Agencies with such committed staff
- Look forward to working with County leadership and Legislature along with collaborating with our Child Welfare Stakeholders on ensuring that 2021 is a success

Mr. Burtis:

- Please elaborate on the \$11.9M moving to Mental Health

Ms. Rooney:

- Most of Mental health service is through contractual partners; contracts will move over to Children and Family services in 2021

Mr. Rowley:

- How many dollars related to Raise the Age?

Mr. Morgan:

- Biggest ask is in the JDPINS – shift to children in that category area – fully funded by State and incorporated in budget – any Raise the Age still anticipated 100% coverage from the State
- Finishing touches on cross walk – will show the budget before the shift – will send that over to show the before and after for transparency
- Program costs drive this budget; PINs of \$2M, State training school; very little control over this population

- Already know bill for next year which is budgeted; part is because courts are closed and can't move clients through the Court system
- 20% State aid reduction is about \$20M – still seeing reductions at the 20% level – State is deducting now instead of asking for money back or reducing end of year aid
- Cost of claims for Raise the Age are separated from normal recurring costs

Mr. Rowley:

- Trust that Raise the Age is fully funded – reductions from the State doesn't impact Raise the Age

Dr. Chase:

- Only two people in Youth bureau which is a very active group – important to keep the kids occupied while not in school – is this enough to keep things rolling along?
- Upstate is opening a mental health program for adolescent which will have a lot of capacity for clinic type work and should provide another resource

Mr. Gasiorowski:

- Been working with this staff for quite some time

Mr. Morgan:

- Most of these are contracts; still looking at \$20M in contracts that are monitored and implemented

Mrs. Abbott-Kenan:

- Still undeniable that mental health for Youth is severely lacking in this area – obviously can't fund everything that is critically needed – what was biggest impact from pandemic?

Mr. Gasiorowski:

- Courts being closed especially with trying to reunite foster kids with families

Mr. Burtis:

- Are other communities facing the same increase in foster care

Ms. Cunningham:

- Yes, increase across the State; OFCS allowed virtual visits, having workers going face to face, also clients aren't getting services which delays progress
- Sycamore House not open but being creative to find housing for these hard to place kids and move them to permanent goals

Ms. Kuhn:

- Update on Foster Family recruitment

Ms. Cunningham:

- Working with Hillside, a bit slower; still need creativity – educating foster families to make it safe to take in foster kids during the pandemic

HEALTH DEPARTMENT: (4-24) Dr. Indu Gupta, Commissioner; Michelle Magano, Deputy Commissioner

Dr. Gupta:

- Express deepest gratitude to County Executive and Deputy County Executive Rooney; supporters who follow data and science; to control the crisis is a gift – honored to serve
- Appreciate Deputy Commissioner Michelle Mignano, Senior Administrative Office Kristi Smiley, Fiscal Officer Stephen Smorol, Senior Leadership team and the entire staff – all working 7 days a week to serve community
- Decrease of \$2.5M because of austerity measures – will follow these measures in 2021 budget
- Humbled by the strong staff work by the that do COVID as well as regular duties

- Entire staff is working to the best of their ability with laser focus on protecting and serving our community
- Current work is laser focused on case investigations and contact tracing to control the spread of the virus
- Working alongside EMS, Health and Human Safety, IT, Law Enforcement and other Agencies within the County
- Working on vaccination plan
- Virus does not discriminate - those that are vulnerable suffer consequences to include hospitalizations, ICU care, use of ventilator, and some death
- Have spoken to the Legislature in the past to report progress and planning to show the crucial work done by the team pre and post pandemic
- Unprecedented times so especially thankful for your support

Dr. Chase:

- Another presentation talked about the Forensic Lab – could you talk about the oversight and its involvement

Dr. Gupta:

- Housed in Health Department for more than 15-20 years – see a true value of it being within the Health Department – in terms of DNA, ballistics, different sections are there to provide a balancing act by providing science based evidence to support Law Enforcement and the people – avoids any type of conflict of interest

Mr. Rowley:

- Roster shows two creates - Medical Director grade 42 and Director of Children Services grade 35

Dr Gupta:

- Medical Director intends to retire within the next year – put a plan in place – create a position and start a search – depends on whether that position will be an employee or contract with the County
- In 2017 there were two different programs - one was eliminated and combined and downgraded to have one position to 13 – in hindsight work continues to increase – person overseeing the Department can't do what this job demands – two separate areas; early intervention and preschool – impossible task to do with one person

Mr. Burtis:

- 2020 adopted budget shows Other employee wages at \$64K; modified is \$156K

Dr. Gupta:

- Retirements and haven't filled these positions so trying to fill with 103 positions

Mr. Rowley:

- A lot more Federal aid coming into the budget

Ms. Magano:

- NYS Department of Health grant money funding from CDC – unique funding stream from the Federal Government

Mrs. Abbott-Kenan:

- Early intervention – importance of OT and PT is to support kids in the early years
- Ability to support kids with test kits to test 20% of students

DR. Gupta:

- Trying times - seeing cases in community spread – kids are vulnerable – parent has to weigh the pros and cons and then take the next steps – services are available and providers are taking all the necessary steps to protect children and families

Ms. Rooney:

- We have 35K of the BinaxNow kits that are less invasive that are good with children; conference call at 11am with all schools in the yellow zone – schools polling parents to allow children to be tested
- Redeploying workforce with school age children at home – planning to focus on elementary schools

- Have a test school this afternoon – will test up to 50 schools per week so schools may remain open
- Not seeing the spread in schools – tackling an issue which is nonexistent at this point
- If this plan works we have five teams ready to go to test schools
- First time to use Onondaga County Article 28 – to the point where others are taped out for testing – quite a process to allow County to do their own testing
- Answer to Mr. Rowley’s question – if schools cannot get 20% tested they will be forced to go remote
- Answer to Mr. Ryan’s question – they will use rapid testing with results in 15 minutes

Mr. Burtis:

- Why does government put gyms in with restaurants and bars – 69K visits recorded and no problems inside friend’s gym

Dr. Gupta:

- One of the principle questions is how to break the cycle of transmission – where do people congregate – schools, colleges, nursing homes, working places, gyms, bars – a place where people come from various places and meet
- When you have so much high transmission the principle is not to go after any one organization – the bars have been important – but it’s everywhere – you cannot think you can go without a mask – the mindset cannot be that one can go and do whatever and not get the virus – demand strong policies
- Schools cooperative to provide measures for students and teachers – work collaborative in real time – proactive steps have helped to reduce transmission– they are under the State Department of Education and Department of Health
- Gyms have no State regulations – no guidelines – make inspection checklist and have staff see if they are following guidelines – helps by taking alternative measures
- Trying to protect hospital surge capacity – seen throughout the Country – asthma, heart attack , diabetes, fractured hip are pushed aside to meet COVID demands
- Push events, holidays, Thanksgiving aside and the virus will be behind us – vaccine is on its way – hoping there is a light at the end of the tunnel, be patient and everything will pass
- Impressed with what the community has done to put in measures to eliminate spread – pause, take care of it and move on

Ms. Kuhn:

- Applaud for collaboration with schools
- Does yellow zone have any impact on grocery stores

Dr. Gupta:

- No impact on grocery stores - you are responsible to keep mask, sanitizer – google zone descriptions and it shows detail

Ms. Cody:

- Talk briefly about vaccine distribution

Dr. Gupta:

- States are planning to work with Federal government – how next administration will handle distribution isn’t evident yet – prefer distribution goes State then County for control and tracking purposes
- Hoping for vaccine by next Spring – working to submit plan to the State – worked with H1N1 on distribution – depends on how it is available, how it will come to the County and the type of vaccine.

Mrs. Abbott-Kenan:

- Very impressive what you are doing and thank you

Mr. Burtis:

- Please take back our gratitude to you and your staff

VETERANS SERVICE AGENCY: (4-84) Anne-Marie Mancilla, Director , Cindy Milea,

Ms. Mancilla

- The Veterans Service Agency became a stand-alone Department effective April 2020, this has presented our Department the opportunity to review policies, procedures and protocol that have a direct impact on our budget. As a result, a significant increase of interdepartmental changes has occurred. There is a projected 20% reduction in State Aid.
- We have reviewed our contracts with Syracuse University Veterans Law Clinic and Clear Path For Veterans. Our partners in both agencies support the mission of the VSA and the scope of these contracts for 2021 will directly impact our day to day mission. Due to COVID we have reduced contracts by 15%.
- We worked closely with Onondaga County Parks Department during the renovation and re-dedication of the Veterans' Chapel.
- We currently have three full-time positions; one Director, one full-time Veteran Service Officer ("VSO") and one full-time Information Aid. Salaries have decreased due to a part-time VSO transitioning to full-time and we have one vacant VSO position.
- Anticipate filling the Assistant Director position in 2021.
- The VSA can average upwards of 50 multi-layered phone calls per day and continue to create connections to specific community resources for veterans and their families.
- Reduced training expenses by consolidating mandatory training with NYS Division of Veterans Services. All staff is now accredited with NYS DVS to include qualified non-veteran staff which is not authorized by the American Legion. This has allowed our agency to more effectively assist veterans and their families with VA claims.
- The passing of Local Law 01-2019 Waiving the Burial Free for Veterans and their dependents directly lead to a 68% increase in pre-need burial applications in 2019. To date, we have reimbursed the community \$584,390.
- Cost containment initiatives enacted by the VSA include identifying Indigent Veterans Spouse burial costs not previously collected. We have established a process to collect these DSS-NYS reimbursements monthly. We are seeking reimbursement for the last two years, which is the maximum amount of years we can go back. To date we have recouped \$20,700. This covers 23 Indigent spouse burials for 2018 to present.
- The VSA also continues to seek reimbursement for the Department of Veterans Affairs, when applicable, and NYS Division of Veterans Services for Indigent Veteran Burials. In regards to revenue enhancement, in 2020 we have approved 30 Indigent Burial applications at \$72,022. To date, the VSA has collectively recouped \$14,856.51. Efforts continue daily to recoup from all funding sources. The VSA has consolidated costs by identifying areas in which funding can be reduced without causing interruption of services.

Mr. Jordan:

- What is being done to receive the maximum reimbursement?

Ms. Mancilla:

- 2020 focus is to maximize the reimbursement – going back to 2018 for spouse – spouse is only going to be a State reimbursement – multiple agencies on reimbursement
- Funeral home is paid by the County and then County applies for reimbursement
- No cost to the County for non indigent burials – worked out between family and funeral home
- Still charging family for non indigent burials – assist with paperwork

JR

- Plans for 103 monies – \$15,600 for salary

Ms. Mancilla:

- Promotion and hire an additional staff member

Mr. Knapp:

- Thanks for taking over and hitting the ground running

Mr. Burtis:

- Some of the obstacles of interacting with veterans
- Is call volume up?

Ms. Mancilla:

- Phone calls have increased with multi layers – assistant with housing, heat, and not just hand off to another Agency – pride ourselves to get back to people as soon as possible
- A lot of the veterans that we work with are happy to finally get a live person; they want answers even if not in our area
- Lose staff to support County COVID efforts

Mr. Knapp:

- Officially done with hearings – encourage all to look at written statements that we didn't hear from directly – reach out to Darcie with questions – keep the communication open – Final WMS questions next Thursday

Chair Burtis thanked and adjourned the meeting at 11:03 am

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Melanie Vilarde". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

MELANIE VILARDI, Deputy Clerk
ONONDAGA COUNTY LEGISLATURE

ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE: HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

DATE: NOVEMBER 12, 2020

NAME (Please Print)	DEPARTMENT/AGENCY
Lupit Tawhi	Law
Lisa Alford	ALTCs
W. Anne Spoto Decker	ALTCs
Rita Heald	Comptroller
Amy Cunningham	DCFS
Ryan DMS/DKowl	IRB
Judith Cyr	OCHD
Michelle Mignano	OCHD
Cindy Meili	USA
Anne-Marie Manulla	USA