HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
COMMITTEE MINUTES – SEPTEMBER 24, 2026
DAN ROMEO, CHAIR

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. Romeo, Mr. Kelly, Ms. Denton, Ms. Block, Mr. Burtis
ALSO PRESENT: Mr. Bush, Mr. Brown, Mr. Ryan

Chair Romeo called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m., and the previous meeting's minutes were approved.

1. COUNTY LEGISLATURE:

a. DISCUSSION: Establishing New American Affairs Council

Chair Romeo noted that discussions are being had about establishing a New American Affairs Council, meant to address the needs new Americans currently have and are projected to have, with a partnership between the City of Syracuse and Onondaga County. Details are being hashed out, and anyone who wants to be part of those discussions can reach out to the chair. The item will be going to Ways & Means, and was brought to Health & Human Services because many of the needs within that community are related to Health & Human Services.

Questions/Comments:

- Makeup of the council?
  - Working out; 12 people split between the city and the county
  - Exact splits being discussed; who makes appointments would be some representation from the county and some from the city
  - Some appointments have specific qualifications; a variety of professional opinions in the group
  - Minimum requirements for a number of new Americans on the council; direct representation
- Resolution says five voting by the County Executive, seven by the Chair of the Legislature?
  - A draft; not finalized yet; still working on the specific details
  - Read the draft; comments, concerns can be discussed
  - May stay the way it is, but some may want it to change; getting input
- Rationale to have non-voting members join a group of voting members?
  - Input and perspective; not a huge group that needs to vote; restricting the decision making piece to a manageable group
- Automatically three people put on the sidelines, yet asked to be participants as the same full voting members; a concept difficult to rationalize
  - Still ironing out some details with the city in terms of how the city wants to be participating
  - Recommended that if the city was going to be making appointments to this board, recommendations made by the council should be made to the county and the city
  - City has not agreed to that yet; why in the draft form those members are non-voting at the moment
- Is this a county board or a city county board?
  - Intent is the latter, a city and county board

    - City has not fully agreed to it at this point; why they do not have direct voting representation at the moment
- Wouldn't it make more sense to have this as a countywide board?
    - A countywide board would be the simplest way to go about it
    - With the disproportionate representation of new Americans being in the city, important for the city to be involved
    - Leveraging whatever resources the city is able to do, or specific needs related to city government
    - County restricted in terms of jurisdictional coverage; having the city there to address all of those needs the best approach
- Understand the makeup of the board; the larger any board, the less gets done; always for getting outside opinions
- Like that one individual coming out of the chair of the legislature is between the ages of 16 and 24; good and reasonable
- Difference between the word expertise and professional expertise; all of them say have an expertise in this or that; could be challenging
    - Experience, expertise, professional expertise; three levels
    - Finding these individuals that are new Americans, by a very broad definition
    - Would be okay with experience or lived experience
- Makeup of different boards and how those positions are filled; a lot of boards have representation from minority and majority leaders; how did the board get to such a concentration coming from the chair of the legislature, and is that customary with other boards?
    - Not known if it was structured off of other boards or just the idea
    - No say in the composition
    - Usually depends on however the board is created, wherever it comes out of; the legislature, the executive, a partnership between the two, or a department
    - Not a standard form
- No standard; in material as chair for boards, a given to try to find people with expertise or professional expertise for the board
    - A county fish advisory board; people there with professional expertise, people there with experience
- As far as the mayor and the councilors at large, understand; the more barriers put up, the harder they are to jump over
    - Can see how long it takes both those bodies to come up with people as defined
- A great idea; trying to meet the needs of all constituents

b. DISCUSSION: Budget Discussion & Follow-Up Items

Chair Romeo reviewed follow-up items from the budget review hearings with CFO Smiley.

Grant Funding

- Grant has fully been expended

Senior Center Capital Grants

- Budget of $1,250,000; original $1M, then $250,000; all obligated
- About $1.1M has already gone out the door
- Remaining waiting for the finalization of those projects; will be expended as well
- Out the door; can see who it is going to?
    - Will have to pull that information

Positions

- Working with the departments; under review right now

Committee on Special Education Reimbursement

- Reimbursement from the school districts
- Reimbursement percentage about 56% for any placements from the Committee on Special Education
- 2025 revenue higher due to prior year payments; the anomaly
- Budget correct as written based on what is anticipated
- School years being different than the budget year throws that off sometimes

Temporary Assistance

- Percent of clients working on TA about 4.5%
- Very low because oftentimes after beginning work, temporary assistance benefits go away; remain with SNAP

State Cases

- Reached out to the state, which does most of the cases; numbers not available right now; will get back

Chair Romeo noted that DCFS and Health and Human Services have come before the committee almost every month throughout the year, and that discussions with Ann Rooney about improvements and increases in those departments, including increasing staffing, are ongoing but not yet finalized.

- A long-going conversation; a solution very challenging

Chair Romeo noted that the budget is not just a September thing but a year-round thing, that the discussions held all year have helped to inform the increases being considered, and that members will be contacted when ready.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Ms. Denton, seconded by Ms. Block, to adjourn the meeting; MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:23 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



HASSINA K. ADAMS, Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature