

**Health & Human Services Committee**  
**August 30, 2022**  
**Minutes**

**Members Present:** Committee Chair Anthony Doldo, Legislators Philip Reed, Allen Drake, John Peck, Jeremiah Maxon, Frances Calarco, Corey Grant, Board Chair William Johnson

**Others Present:** Legislators Robert Cantwell, Michael Montigelli, Daniel McBride, Patrick Jareo, and Scott Gray, County Administrator Robert Hagemann, Deputy Administrator Sarah Baldwin, County Attorney David Paulsen, Community Services Director Tim Ruetten, Public Health Director Ginger Hall, DSS Commissioner Teresa Gaffney, Veterans Service Agency Director Dave Pavey, Confidential Secretary Jill Jones

Chairman Doldo called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. He offered privilege of the floor, however no one present wished to speak. The Committee approved the minutes of the June meeting, as written.

DSS Commissioner Teresa Gaffney addressed the Committee with regard to a New York State Office of Children and Family Services Program Quality Improvement (PQI) Review of Jefferson County DSS Programs, and believed legislators all received a copy of the review. She said the State has a unit that performs the review and does a debriefing providing DSS with all the information in the report, along with detailed information on the case specifics which she can't share because it is case specific and confidential. In the debriefing with the State they made some comments, one being the amount of strengths overall was significant from their view point, and they also said it was one of the strongest reviews they have had in the three years this unit has been doing them, however there were also definitely areas needing improvement.

She highlighted the significant strengths the State identified and areas needing improvement in Child Protective Services, Prevent and Protective cases, and Foster Care cases. As legislators review the report she said each area is broken down further and DSS needs to concentrate on the areas needing improvement and are required to come up with a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) in those areas. She said they are currently working with the Regional Office on their PIP which is still in draft form.

Commissioner Gaffney said through the process they have had their own supervisory staff review workers' cases again, specific to the areas needing improvement. There are identified areas they need to work on improving, and there are other areas where the process has raised some questions regarding what was done by DSS workers and what they may be lacking in order to get a better understanding before moving forward. She said they will work with the Regional Office to gain clarity for what they are missing in those areas. Even though their PIP is not finalized they have already implemented some of the following:

- ▶ Working with SUNY Professional Development Program to provide coaching support and training to caseworkers and supervisory staff;

- ▶ Conducting case reviews with their Regional Office Lead once per month (1 CPS case, 1 Preventive, and 1 Foster Care case) to gain knowledge about all supervisors looking at the same things and making sure that they are all applying what they need to the cases, and gathering the data and documentation consistently.

She identified additional planned actions:

- ▶ Provide staff with CPS history review document and provide training on it
- ▶ Training to be provided to staff to better assess and address the service needs of fathers;
- ▶ Grade A Supervisor will be reviewing Foster Care and Preventive cases monthly and provide feedback to the Supervisors;
- ▶ Director of Services will be meeting quarterly with voluntary Administration to discuss trends and concerns on cases;
- ▶ Caseworkers will also be meeting monthly with voluntary agency staff to discuss case updates;
- ▶ Supervisors will utilize supervision to make sure casework activities are current, especially those identified as areas needing improvement.

Commissioner Gaffney said despite the staffing challenges they had and continue to have, the many strengths identified in the PQI are a reflection of the hard work and dedication of the staff they have that give their all to ensure the health and safety of the children and families in Jefferson County. Casework is extremely difficult both emotionally and physically due to being field based, personal safety risk, high accountability, intense urgency and high stress. Caseworkers must be mediators, investigators, grief and loss counselors, crisis responders, rapport builders, motivators, advocates, consolers, service brokers, persuaders, detailed record keepers, fact reporters, medical assessors, system navigators, role models, and extreme problem solvers. The subject matter of their work brings out strong opinions and emotion and is naturally subject to scrutiny. The work is rarely viewed as right by others. She said they use the best information they have to weigh the risk and benefits of all options at the time decisions must be made; all they have is foresight when they are making decisions. Sometimes things change when viewed in hindsight, it is difficult to understand and very easy to criticize.

She said caseworkers are as good as the information they can obtain and verify from children, family members and community sources: they cannot always predict unconscionable human behavior any more than any other systems, and sometimes people intentionally deceive them. She added that human behavior is often unpredictable and trauma can quickly change responses to plans they make with people. No matter how skilled a caseworker is there will always be discrepancies in the information provided by adults, children and other collateral sources. There is frequently no physical evidence of neglect or abuse and it is difficult to go home at the end of the day knowing that no matter what excellent work was done there are still unknowns because they work with the uncertainties and the dynamics of human behavior. She said DSS understands what they do requires the highest level of public scrutiny and they take their need for ongoing learning seriously, and will take the information provided by the PQI and use it as intended - to help them focus on those areas needing additional learning, training and

oversight. Commissioner Gaffney answered questions of legislators related to the report and related to caseworker and supervisor training, coaching, job duties, and oversight. Mr. Hagemann advised that a copy of the report was put in the regular mail (not email) to Legislators earlier this month.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Authorizing Agreements for Provision of Services to Elderly of Jefferson County and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Maxon seconded by Legislator Peck and there being no discussion, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Authorizing Agreement for Provision of Personal Chores Services and Home Modification Program with Community Action Planning Council (CAPC) and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Maxon and seconded by Legislator Grant. Chairman Doldo advised that CAPC accomplishes this work through employees in their Weatherization Program, and \$50/ hour is very reasonable for the work that is done. Administrator Hagemann advised that it is the same rate as the current contract with CAPC for this service. Following brief discussion, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Authorizing Agreement for Provision of Consumer Directed In-Home Services by Western New York Independent Living, Inc. and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Maxon seconded by Legislator Reed and there being no discussion, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Authorizing Agreement for Provision of Personal Emergency Response Systems Funding with the Henry Keep Home and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Maxon seconded by Legislator Calarco and there being no discussion, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Authorizing Agreement for Provision of Transportation Services to Elderly of Jefferson County and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Maxon seconded by Legislator Peck and there being no discussion, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Authorizing Agreement for Provision of Respite Services through the Office for the Aging and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Calarco seconded by Legislator Peck and there being no discussion, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Accepting Funding for the Provision of Veteran Services by the Joseph E. Dwyer Peer to Peer Program and Amending the 2022 County Budget and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Maxon seconded by Legislator Reed and there being no discussion, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Accepting Funding for Community Medicine and Paramedicine Program, Authorizing Agreement and Amending the 2022 County Budget in Relation Thereto and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Maxon seconded by Legislator Reed and there being no discussion, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Authorizing Amended Agreement with Center for Disease Detection for Laboratory Services in Connection with the Public Health Service Diagnostic and Treatment Center and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Maxon seconded by Legislator Calarco and there being no discussion, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Amending the 2022 County Budget Relative to Public Health Department Rabies Accounts and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Maxon seconded by Legislator Peck and there being no discussion, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Amending the 2022 County Budget Relative to Public Health Department Medical Examiner Accounts and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Maxon seconded by Legislator Reed and there being no discussion, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Authorizing an Agreement with Code Enforcement and Amending the 2022 County Budget Relative to Public Health Department Childhood Lead Poison Prevention Accounts and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Grant seconded by Legislator Maxon and there being no discussion, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Amending the 2022 County Budget and Establishing an Assistant Code Enforcement Officer in Relation to the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Maxon seconded by Legislator Reed and there being no discussion, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

There was brief discussion concerning the recent Press Release from Public Health about a case of Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) in the County. County Administrator Hagemann advised that the cases of EEE found in Jefferson County in the past and now have involved the Amish community. Public Health Director Hall advised that EEE is a mosquito borne illness and was last detected in the County in 2020. It was effectively dealt with at that time by having horses vaccinated and having Duplo spray in the affected areas. Public Health has been in contact with large animal veterinarians in the area who have a very good working relationship with the Amish so they can suggest vaccinations again and look for animals that have the symptoms. She said they are not currently trapping mosquitoes like in the past, she has made preliminary contact with Duplo in case spraying is needed, and expects there to be a conference call very soon on the matter with New York State regarding a course of action.

Legislator Maxon asked if the paramedicine grant is to develop a comprehensive program, or if they are also going to implement the program and perform the duties. Director Hall said they will be preparing the program, setting up the curriculum, getting the equipment needed and hope to have the program operating by October. They have five main agencies that are going to have staff participate. They will start with two people from each agency for training and those individuals will be paired with one of the Public Health nurses who will refer them a case and they will work and coordinate care together. She said Public Health has tried to initiate the program many times and this one is supported by the New York State Health Department who have put up barriers before, but because the Healthcare Association and the Home Care Association recognizes we have a shortage of nurses and other staff and have a resource we can tap, they have agreed to go along with the program. Public Health and the agencies are excited to get started.

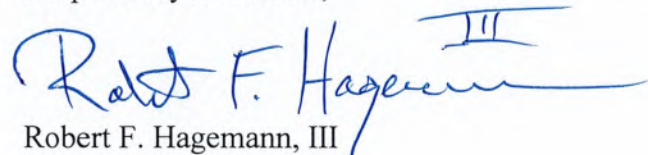
County Attorney Paulsen advised that his office has engaged the Bonadio Group to do a performance analysis of the Department of Social Services. They will be beginning in mid-September and it will be a 6 month process for them to do a variety of processes including doing random analysis of files. They will also be interviewing stakeholders in the community and employees of the department, and preparing a final report. He said the report will hopefully outline areas of strengths, areas of weaknesses and giving us some recommendations of how to move forward with anything the Board may wish to do with the department.

With regard to the Homeless Task Force, Administrator Hagemann stated that a number of things are being looked at but the devil is in the details and it is progressing nicely. He said they have had a number of meetings and have been in contact with other communities who have addressed this issue to gain insight and not reinvent the wheel. He said they are close to putting a package together but the biggest challenge is that one shoe does not fit all.

Administrator Hagemann advised that a formal response to correspondence from the Village of West Carthage Mayor regarding his suggestion that the Watertown Correctional Facility be used for a homeless shelter has not been done, but it has been communicated in informal conversations that it isn't necessarily a viable option at this point.

There being no further business of the Committee, on a motion by Legislator Maxon seconded by Legislator Grant and unanimously carried, the meeting was adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Robert F. Hagemann, III  
Clerk of the Board