

**HEALTH, SOCIAL, EDUCATIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE  
MEETING  
HELD VIA AUDIO WEBINAR  
PURSUANT TO TEMPORARY EMERGENCY ORDERS**

**Chairwoman Sayegh, Legislators Addonizio & Nacerino**

**Tuesday**

**6:00 PM**

**April 20, 2021**

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The meeting was called to order via audio webinar at 6:01 P.M. by Chairwoman Sayegh who led in the Pledge of Allegiance. Upon roll call Committee Members Addonizio, Nacerino, and Chairwoman Sayegh were present.

**Item #3 - Discussion/COVID-19 Impacts on Mental Health/Commissioner of Social Services Michael Piazza**

Chairwoman Sayegh stated Commissioner of Social Services Michael Piazza is on the audio webinar and will be speaking to this important topic.

Commissioner Piazza explained since the beginning of the pandemic the providers both in the mental health and substance abuse arenas have been concerned about what the impact will be on peoples' mental health. He stated there has been a lot of coverage in the media, newspapers, television, and radio about what happens to people when they are in "lockdown". He stated the loss of socialization and the ability to have fun is raising concern for adults and our children. He stated during a Providers Meeting today, this matter was on the agenda, asking the question "Where Are We" one (1) year in dealing with the pandemic. He stated he would like to preface this by stating the kids have begun going back to the schools last week, in some of the districts. He stated that he heard the energy in the schools was so positive, there was a buzz, and the kids were so happy to be back and so were the faculty and administration. He stated also it was reported today during the meeting, there is an increase in reports from teachers about kids in crisis, since the kids have been back in school. He stated the challenge here is, were the kids in crisis and now because they are back in school it is being identified or did the return to school cause the crisis. He stated the treatment programs that have the capacity to treat children and adolescence are at full capacity. He stated this includes the voluntary not-for-profits and the for-profit providers that specialize in treating children. He stated in the adult clinics, there is also a waiting list. He stated he is also hearing from people in the community that had COVID and their challenges with the lasting effects of fatigue and low energy that are lingering for many months. He stated also that there are other side effects he is hearing that are showing up such as loss of hair, which is disconcerting to people. He explained people are receiving therapy today for depression or anxiety, he stated we do not know what the future will hold. He stated next he would speak to the substance abuse area. He stated some scenarios they are hearing now that people are working from home, they are choosing to have a cocktail during the day rather than waiting for the evening. He stated also people are turning to drugs and alcohol to medicate for the loneliness or the isolation or the depression, and this does not include the people who test positive for COVID and have been ill. He stated the substance abuse clinics have openings. He stated if people wish to be seen in the outpatient programs they can. He stated the inpatient,

residential programs, at Arms Acres and St. Christopher's, there are ups and downs due to when there is a positive COVID case that begins to spread, the units are shut down to stop the spread. He stated in those times admissions must shut down. He stated as the Vaccines continue to be administered the spread of COVID will be mitigated. He explained the aftereffects will still be dealt with. He stated there have been studies regarding the unemployment paid to those who have lost their jobs due to the pandemic. He stated the research shows the financial safety net has been very helpful to peoples' mental health. He stated the social programs that were put into place in the community and including in Social Services such as eviction moratoriums, we will be receiving emergency rent funding from the State through the Federal Government, to help tenants who could not pay their rent. He stated these programs are helping. He spoke to the number of suicide cases and overdoses. He stated they are concerned and vigilant in getting out in the community the information about the crisis hotline, where treatment is available and get people into treatment as quickly as possible. He stated they are doing a lot of work with law enforcement in mental health. He stated there is a focus being put on planning, preparing, and looking at best practices. He stated they did submit an application, with the strong support of the Sheriff, the Police Chiefs from Kent, Carmel and Cold Spring, and CoveCare. He stated if the grant is awarded it will be used to outfit officers in the field with a tablet that will be used when they respond to an emotional disturbance call. He explained the officer will be able to connect the individual to the CoveCare Crisis Worker. He stated the Crisis Worker will be able to assess the individual. He stated this will provide a safety net for the person in emotional distress and it may reduce the need for the individual to be brought to the hospital. He stated this pilot program ran in Ontario County, and proved to be effective. He stated another benefit of this would be that there is a chance that the individual may already be a client of CoveCare, so the fact that there could already be a connection may aid in the resolution of the crisis and finally if the individual is not connected to CoveCare this would present the opportunity to connect that person to community support and treatment. He stated there will probably still be a need to bring some individuals in by the officers to the hospital for evaluation.

Chairwoman Sayegh requested that Commissioner Piazza provide the Hotline phone number.

Commissioner Piazza stated it is 845-225-1222. He stated that number is answered 24/7. He stated during this pandemic the call volume has increased, particularly in the evening. He explained people call to just talk. He stated the Hotline workers have reported that they believe many of those calls were made as a result of loneliness.

Chairwoman Sayegh facilitated discussion related to potential future programs to help address the anxiety of parents and students related to the returning to school.

Legislator Nacerino stated during the Police Policy Review Panel discussions it was noted and recommended the importance of having a mental health professional interact with law enforcement. She stated it is wonderful to hear this goal is being realized.

Legislator Addonizio stated in addition to the anxiety to the school kids in terms of going back in person there is academic anxiety. She stated she believes it is important to recognize the social, emotional, academic, and mental health impact associated with COVID. She expressed her opinion that there is a strong need to help children and adults to cope with the stress and

depression. She stated she hopes now that schools are open, the teachers will have the opportunity to recognize the needs of the students and hopefully direct them to treatment.

Chairwoman Sayegh stated it is interesting the social programs are working in helping mitigate some of the stresses of COVID-19. She stated in addition to them being good social programs, they are proving to be good for mental health. She thanked and acknowledged the Commissioner and his staff for all of the great work they are doing.

#### **Item #4 - Discussion/Home Delivered Meals Program/Director of the Office for Senior Resources Michael Cunningham**

Chairwoman Sayegh stated the Putnam County Legislature received a letter from a constituent whose mother is a recipient of the meals delivered by the County's Office for Senior Resources (OSR) nutrition program. She stated the letter sang the praises of the OSR program. She read the letter. She stated in summary, the person who was delivering the meal to the constituent's mother on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, recognized some concerning signs of confusion. The employee contacted the OSR office who then contacted a family member. She stated all of this led to the OSR Client being brought to the hospital and being treated accordingly. She stated the OSR Client is back in her home and doing well. She stated her family is very thankful for the response of the OSR Employee and wanted to express their gratitude and point out the fact that the nutrition program food delivery program is more than just that it is also a connection to the community for those Senior clients, it is also a quick check on their wellbeing. She stated she read this letter because it documents just one of the many heroic acts that are performed by the OSR office.

Director of the Office for Senior Resources Michael Cunningham expressed his appreciation to Chairwoman Sayegh for taking the time to relay this incident. He stated he and the employees of the OSR Department often talk about the fact that the Nutrition Home Delivery program is more than just delivering food. He stated there have been many incidents, like this one, that have occurred over the years, and it points out the importance of the program. He stated this past year has been incredible in terms of the home delivery meal program. He stated in 2019 they delivered 32,000 home meals, and in 2020 it increased significantly to 55,000. He explained the purpose of the program is twofold, good nutrition and human contact. He continued to speak to the increased demands that came because of COVID and the closing of the Senior Resource Centers. He stated the staff has risen to the increased demands and have done and continue to do a great job. He explained that the human contact to the clients and family members is as valuable as the nutritional value being delivered. He continued to speak to the menus that are offered, and the different programs implemented, such as Grab and Go, for those who can drive to pick up their meal. He stated they deliver approximately 300 meals a day and there are approximately 100 Grab and Go meals picked up per day. He also stated this is all made possible through the support of the Administration, the Legislature, and the Taxpayers.

Chairwoman Sayegh requested Director Cunningham provide details to the program.

Director Cunningham stated a hot lunch is delivered daily to clients. He stated in some cases they will add to that if there is a need. He explained in those cases they will provide a frozen

meal for dinner or even for seven (7) days a week, if there is a need. He stated some of the clients only need the hot meal two (2) days a week, so that is accommodated also.

Legislator Nacerino expressed her accolades to Director Cunningham and his staff for all they have done and for stepping up during COVID to meet the needs of our Seniors.

Legislator Addonizio expressed her sincere appreciation to Director Cunningham and his staff as well. She stated the care, concern, along with providing the daily meals to our Seniors are all so valuable. She explained since the start of the pandemic she has been distributing food every week to people in our community and through this outreach, she met many seniors that were in need, and directed them to get in touch with the County's OSR office.

Legislator Montgomery expressed her appreciation for the fine work done by Director Cunningham and his staff. She stated the efforts of the OSR does compliment these other resources, as Legislator Addonizio spoke about. She stated OSR is at the head of this, and she sees in each district volunteers who are pitching in to help those who are in need and different programs being run. She stated in Philipstown she partnered with the Town and they developed a voucher program to feed seniors. She stated the Food Pantry in Putnam Valley is delivering meals and groceries also. She stated the Food Pantry in Philipstown is still up and running. She stated the efforts and the community involvement have been amazing. She stated OSR's example has been a great guide.

Chairwoman Sayegh thanked Director Cunningham for his leadership and praised his staff.

#### **Item #5 - Discussion/Marijuana Legalization by New York State**

Chairwoman Sayegh stated since she has been on the Legislature the matter of the recreational use of marijuana becoming legalized and what would be the impacts on the State of New York has been a discussion item. She stated in March 2018, this committee hosted the discussion of this matter with members of the community. She stated the Executive Director of the Prevention Council Kristin McConnell was at that meeting also. She stated the Legislature has passed a resolution urging the State of New York to cover any costs that would be related to the legalization of marijuana on County Government. She stated there were also seminars held. She stated on March 31, 2021, Governor Cuomo signed into law the New York State Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act, establishing the Cannabis law, and making recreational marijuana legal in New York. She read some excerpts from the law. She stated it is her opinion the entire reason for legalizing the recreational use of marijuana is for revenue to the New York State, regardless of the implications. She stated County Executive Odell released a statement calling this legislation a "cash grab" by New York State at the expense of the health and safety of our communities. She stated law states 9% of the retail tax will go to the State of New York, 4% will go to the localities where the dispensary is located (1% is retained by the County and 3% goes to the town, city, or village). She stated Legislator Addonizio wanted to discuss the parameters of the opt-out provisions of the New York State cannabis law.

Legislator Addonizio explained many constituents have reached out to her asking if the County will allow dispensaries. She stated she wanted to make it very clear it is not under the County's

purview, but the specifications of the opt-out provisions allow each municipality the opportunity to opt-out. She explained it is the towns, villages, and cities who have the option to opt-out from allowing retail dispensaries. She stated December 31, 2021, is the deadline to adopt a local law to prohibit retail dispensaries. She explained such law would be subject to a referendum, which would allow the voters to decide.

County Attorney Jennifer Bumgarner stated Senior Deputy County Attorney Conrad Pasquale has put together a summary of the contents of the State Legislation in preparation for this evening's meeting.

Senior Deputy County Attorney Pasquale stated the town, villages and cities have the authority to opt-out of allowing retail dispensaries and/or on-site consumption via the local law, subject to permissive referendum. He stated the deadline is December 31, 2021, as stated earlier. He clarified the Counties do not have the authority to opt-out. He stated the County is left with the authority to modify time, place, manner restrictions. He continued to speak to this component. He stated the interesting fact is the State of New York has passed the law however it is still technically prohibited at the Federal level. He stated that is why the County still has the authority to put into effect the certain restrictions, time, place and manner. He continued to speak to the matter.

Chairwoman Sayegh facilitated further discussion on this matter.

Legislator Nacerino stated there is a distinct difference between supporting medical marijuana, which is a controlled substance versus recreational marijuana. She stated she believes the health and safety of our families may be at risk as well as underage usage and the impairment of many. She personally does not believe the revenue anticipated outweighs the perils that we will encounter. She continued to speak to this matter and her concerns with the passing of this law. She stated it is not a law that she supports.

Legislator Albano stated he agrees with the Legislator Nacerino and County Executive Odell. He stated he hopes the towns hold off on this. He stated the option will be available to opt-in, but the restriction to opt-out must be done by December 31, 2021. He stated also the breakdown of the sales tax is not fair. He stated he believes there will be many problems that come about as a result of a law that legalizes the recreational use of marijuana, and it will cost money to address them. He stated he believes this sends a bad message to our young people.

Chairwoman Sayegh expressed her agreement with Legislators Nacerino and Albano.

Legislator Montgomery requested clarification from Senior Deputy County Attorney Pasquale, due to the poor audio connection when he was speaking. She explained she wanted to make sure she heard him correctly. She stated the County can control time, place and manner, is that just on County property or throughout the County.

Senior Deputy County Attorney Pasquale stated his understanding is that it would include the entire County. He elaborated on this matter.

Legislator Jonke stated he believes the State was clever in giving the authority to the towns. He stated he believes it allows for more available sites for the distribution of the marijuana. He stated he does support medicinal use of marijuana. He expressed his opinion that this newly passed law, approving recreational marijuana use is going down a very dangerous path. He stated we need to encourage our municipalities, to look long and hard at this before they take any action or not take an action.

Legislator Sullivan stated New York State is a Home Rule State, that is why the towns should make the decision. He stated this legislation will also grow government in Albany. He explained there will be the need for a cannabis control board, as an example. He stated he believes any revenue generated from this will be eaten up significantly by the hiring of new people and by the benefits and pension that will go along with the new hires. He stated the budget for New York State is double the amount of the State of Florida, which has more people than the State of New York. He stated he believes the New York Governor should be looking for ways to shrink government and reduce the taxes in New York versus taxing people more to generate revenue and increasing the black market in New York. He stated he believes this will cause more problems for people, law enforcement and government.

Legislator Addonizio stated the reason she requested this matter be on the agenda this evening was to clarify the County cannot opt-out, that decision is up to the municipalities.

#### **Item #6 - Discussion/Update/Keep Putnam Beautiful/Legislator Nacerino**

Chairwoman Sayegh provided background on the Putnam County Keep Putnam Beautiful Program which was established in 2005 by Coordinator Walt Thompson. She stated in 2020 of April Legislator Nacerino recognized the need to maintain and even improve the environment in Putnam County is ever present and therefore she reintroduced the Keep Putnam Beautiful slogan.

Legislator Nacerino stated she is happy to bring forward this message. She reiterated; she would like to reintroduce the Keep Putnam Beautiful. She stated she wanted to begin work on doing so last year, however COVID derailed those plans. She stated she sent letters to all the Town Supervisors and Village Mayors requesting they adopt the slogan. She stated in no way does this request impose anything on any municipalities. She explained the intention is to raise awareness by fostering a sense of unity throughout the County as we strive to keep Putnam beautiful together. She stated the Director of Tourism Tracey Walsh will make sure, once the County is notified of clean up events, the information will be posted on the County's Tourism Facebook page. She stated the Towns of Patterson and Southeast clean up dates are April 24, 25<sup>th</sup> and the Town of Putnam Valley is slated for May 2021. She stated photos were received from the Town of Carmel's clean up event, and she looks forward to seeing photos from the other clean up events as they occur, in a renewed sense of spirit and pride in our beautiful County. She stated photos can be sent to [tracey.walsh@putnamcountyny.gov](mailto:tracey.walsh@putnamcountyny.gov).

#### **Item #7 - Approval/Budgetary Amendment 21A027/Historian's Office/Use of Donations to Purchase a Historic Marker and a Table**

Chairwoman Sayegh stated she contacted Jennifer Cassidy who works in the County's Historian Office. She explained this transfer is money from outside donations that came during the 2012 Putnam County Bi-Centennial Celebration. She stated the donation funding in this transfer will be used to purchase a special telescoping table for the handling of certain historical materials and there will be a historic marker purchased for Prince Cornwall, an African American former slave who served in the Revolutionary War. She shared some facts about Mr. Cornwall who lived to be 104 in Putnam County. She stated the County's Historian Office is working diligently to identify more black history in Putnam County. She continued to speak to this matter.

Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to approve Budgetary Amendment 21A027; Seconded by Legislator Addonizio. All in favor.

**Item #8 - Other Business - None**

**Item #10 - Adjournment**

There being no further business at 7:21 P.M. Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to adjourn; Seconded by Legislator Nacerino. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Administrative Assistant Ed Gordon.