

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: SOCIAL SERVICES

DATE: MAY 21, 2009

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<b>COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:</b>	<b>OTHERS PRESENT:</b>
SUPERVISORS TESSIER	SHEILA WEAVER, COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
O'CONNOR	HAL PAYNE, COMMISSIONER OF ADMINISTRATIVE & FISCAL SERVICES
SHEEHAN	JO ANN MCKINSTRY, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF ADMINISTRATIVE &
MERLINO	FISCAL SERVICES
STRAINER	JOAN SADY, CLERK, BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
<b>COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:</b>	SUPERVISORS PITKIN
SUPERVISORS BENTLEY	SOKOL
KENNY	TAYLOR
	THOM RANDALL, <i>THE ADIRONDACK JOURNAL</i>
	AMANDA ALLEN, SR. LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

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Mr. Tessier called the meeting of the Social Services Committee to order at 10:14 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. O'Connor, seconded by Mr. Strainer and carried unanimously to approve the minutes from the April 24, 2009 Committee meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk of the Board.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Sheila Weaver, Commissioner of the Department of Social Services, who distributed copies of the agenda to the Committee members. *A copy of the agenda is also on file with the minutes.*

Commencing the review with Agenda Item 1, Ms. Weaver apprised that a copy of the Overtime Report for the pay period ending May 4, 2009 was included in the agenda and she pointed out that they were currently averaging 45 hours of overtime per pay period. Mr. Strainer questioned how this figure compared to the amount of overtime used during the prior year and Ms. Weaver replied that the current figure was much lower as they had averaged approximately 150 hours of overtime per pay period in the prior year, before she had become Commissioner. Mr. Strainer noted that the Department of Social Services was currently operating with less staff than they had one year ago when the overtime figures were much higher and Ms. Weaver responded that this statement was correct. She added that the reduction in overtime costs were attributed to the fact that she did not authorize any overtime unless it was absolutely necessary and because the Department of Social Services was working with a nearly full staff. Ms. Weaver advised that the Temporary Assistance Division was lacking three staff members which had led to the need for 14 hours in overtime; with respect to the Child Protective Services Division, she said that it was impossible to estimate the amount of overtime necessary as they were required to respond to any reports of child abuse or neglect, which required overtime usage for any reports made after normal working hours.

Ms. Weaver announced that Agenda Item 2 pertained to a request to abolish a Social Welfare Examiner position in the Day Care Unit. She explained that this request was being presented in response to a directive given by the Board of Supervisors which required that three positions be cut from the Department of Social Services. Ms. Weaver reminded the Committee that they, and the Board of Supervisors, had previously authorized her to fill the Social Welfare Examiner position; however, since a candidate had yet to be chosen to fill it, the position could be eliminated without causing a layoff of existing staff. She added that Day Care

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Unit revenues had decreased in response to a lag in demand for services and she did not feel that the Social Welfare Examiner position was necessary.

Mr. Strainer asked if the County received Federal or State reimbursement for the salaries attached to the Day Care Unit positions and Ms. Weaver replied affirmatively, noting that the County received 100% reimbursement for these positions; she added that all of the positions in the Department of Social Services received some percentage of Federal or State reimbursement. Mr. Strainer then questioned whether it was sensible to reduce staffing in areas that received Federal and State reimbursement and Ms. Weaver advised that regardless of the level of funding received, the position was unnecessary and she preferred that it be removed and counted as one of the three positions she was required to eliminate. Mr. Strainer stated that if they were to abolish Federally funded positions, there would actually be a greater cost to the County as they would be paying unemployment for the employee previously filling the position and would receive no Federal or State reimbursement. JoAnn McKinstry, Deputy Commissioner of Administrative & Fiscal Services, apprised of her understanding that if unemployment costs were incurred in connection with Federally subsidized positions, reimbursement could be sought from the appropriate Federal or State entities. Ms. Weaver agreed with Mrs. McKinstry's statement, but noted that she would research the matter to be sure; however, she reiterated, regardless of the availability of reimbursement for unemployment costs, there would be no question with this position as it was vacant.

Motion was made by Mr. Sheehan, seconded by Mr. Merlino and carried unanimously to approve the request to abolish a Social Welfare Examiner position in the Day Care Unit, thereby amending the Department's Table of Organization and refer same to the Personnel Committee. *A copy of the resolution request is on file with the minutes.*

Continuing, Ms. Weaver presented Agenda Item 3 which referred to a request to abolish a Caseworker position in the Preventive Services Unit as the second of the three positions to be eliminated within her Department. As with the previous position discussed, she reminded the Committee that she had previously received permission to fill the Caseworker position and now preferred to eliminate it as it had not been filled and would cause no staff layoffs. Ms. Weaver noted that positions within the Preventive Services Unit received 50-75% Federal and State reimbursement.

Mrs. McKinstry asked if a figure was available for the savings to the Department of Social Services Budget by the elimination of this position and Ms. Weaver replied that she believed the base salary for the position was \$33,900.

Motion was made by Mr. Sheehan, seconded by Mr. Merlino and carried unanimously to approve the request to abolish a Caseworker position in the Preventive Services Unit, thereby amending the Department's Table of Organization and refer same to the Personnel Committee. *A copy of the resolution request is on file with the minutes. Note: One request form was presented for the abolishment of both the Social Welfare Examiner and Caseworker positions.*

Proceeding to Agenda Item 4, Ms. Weaver stated that she had received a bill from the Office of Children and Family Services for Care and Maintenance charge-backs and was pleased to announce that the actual charge-back amount was \$42,720.62, which was \$31,692 less than the amount initially estimated. She added that these were 100% Local Share savings.

Ms. Weaver advised that Agenda Item 5 consisted of several requests to authorize travel for Department of Social Services staff, which she outlined as follows:

1. Request to authorize Kerri Neifeld to attend the Deciding Together Leader Certification program in Albany, NY on June 29<sup>th</sup> through July 1<sup>st</sup>;
2. Request to authorize John Schroeter to attend the "Child Protective Services Response Training" program in Albany, NY on June 29<sup>th</sup> through July 2<sup>nd</sup> and July 13<sup>th</sup> through July 17<sup>th</sup>;
3. Request to authorize Lisa Zulauf to attend the Employment and Advancement Conference in Albany, NY on June 30<sup>th</sup> through July 1<sup>st</sup>;
4. Request to authorize Janet Trackey to attend Welfare-to-Work Core Training in Albany, NY on November 17<sup>th</sup> through November 19<sup>th</sup> and December 8<sup>th</sup> through December 10<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Strainer questioned whether funds were available within the existing budget to cover the travel costs and Ms. Weaver replied affirmatively.

Motion was made by Mr. Strainer, seconded by Mr. Sheehan and carried unanimously to approve all four travel requests as outlined above. *Copies of the Authorization to Attend Meeting or Convention forms are on file with the minutes.*

Mr. Sokol entered the meeting at 10:24 a.m.

Moving on to Agenda Item 6, Ms. Weaver provided an update on the information she had received at the White Eagle Conference she had attended earlier in the month. She apprised that the State had approved a 3% increase in Temporary Assistance grants with the increase to be funded by the State until March of 2011, at which point the cost would be transferred to the County. Ms. Weaver added that an increase in Food Stamp benefits had also been approved and she anticipated a subsequent increase in applicants. She noted that the number of Food Stamp applicants had already increased by 25% over the prior year and she expected the figures to increase further in light of the increased benefits.

Mr. Strainer asked if the County received reimbursement from the State for Food Stamp benefits and Ms. Weaver replied affirmatively, adding that 69% reimbursement was received.

Mr. Sokol questioned why the Food Stamp benefit cards issued sometimes included a cash benefit and Ms. Weaver replied that Food Stamp benefits were never given in cash form and she explained that the cash benefit was actually Temporary Assistance grant funds which were supposed to be used to assist with housing and utility costs. Mr. Tessier asked if there was any way to track the Temporary Assistance grant funds allotted to be sure that they were actually used for housing and utility costs and Ms. Weaver replied that there was not. She advised that her staff had no recourse for adverse use of Temporary Assistance benefits except in cases where someone receiving benefits continually failed to pay their utility bills and subsequently applied for additional cash benefits. Ms. Weaver said that in these cases when they were presented with a utility shut-off notice, the Department of Social Services would typically pay the bill and would then set up a re-payment agreement with the individual for the amount paid; if the individual failed to honor the re-payment agreement, Ms. Weaver stated that Temporary Assistance benefits would not be approved in the future.

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Returning to the update on the White Eagle Conference, Ms. Weaver apprised that there were some upcoming technology changes that would impact the Treasurer's Office in the near future. She stated that the State planned to begin issuing debit cards for Adoption Subsidies, Foster Care and Day Care payments on a State-wide basis in January of 2010. Ms. Weaver said that this would have a definite impact on the cash flow to the Treasurer's Office and she wanted the Committee to be aware of the issue.

Ms. Weaver then advised that the State planned to perform a Title IV-E Federal Audit of her Department in August. She said that the State had been very specific in noting that if any cases reviewed during the Audit failed, it would be a County specific sanction, meaning the County would lose their Title IV-E funding. Ms. Weaver explained that this would have a dramatic impact on her Department as it funded 2/3 of the Foster Care and Adoption cases. Ms. Weaver stated that she was confident that her Department would pass the Audit but wanted to advise the Committee on the matter.

Continuing to Agenda Item 7, Ms. Weaver advised that she did not require an executive session as indicated on the agenda. She noted that as per the request of the Budget Officer she had developed a listing of the State mandated programs provided by her Department, as well as a chart reflecting funding reimbursement percentages on the Federal, State and Local levels, copies of which were included in the agenda and are on file with the minutes. Ms. Weaver pointed out that every program included in the Department of Social Services budget was mandated, aside from the Countryside Adult Home.

Mr. Strainer stated that it was his understanding that there were non-mandated programs offered by the Department of Social Services that could be reduced and that was why the information was requested; Ms. Weaver apprised that this was incorrect and reiterated that the only non-mandated program funded through her Department was the Countryside Adult Home. She said that the Department of Social Services also funded a number of positions and programs throughout other County Departments such as those in the Sheriff's Department, Probation, Youth Bureau, Information Technology, Veterans' Services, Office for the Aging, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Public Health and Public Works. Ms. Weaver stated that they also had a number of contracts, not all of which were mandated, but that resulted in a decrease in tax levy. She said that she had included a copy of the KMG Monitoring Service contract in the agenda to reinforce this point, as although the contract incurred a cost of \$1,950 annually, it saved the County over \$39,000 per year. Ms. Weaver stated that before eliminating any non-mandated contracts, she encouraged the Committee to review the contracts to be sure that they were not eliminating anything of this nature.

Mr. Strainer asked if a listing of contracts had been submitted and Ms. Weaver replied that she had forwarded the listing to Hal Payne, Commissioner of Administrative & Fiscal Services.

With respect to the possibility of a retirement incentive, Ms. Weaver apprised that it was the consensus of her staff that the incentive would have to include a minimum of one month's credit for every year of service. She added that as of July 31<sup>st</sup> she would have 11 staff members interested in the retirement incentive and of those positions, there were at least four that would need to be filled in order for her Department to function smoothly.

Ms. Weaver stated that while she understood that the County as a whole needed to save money and eliminate positions, her biggest dilemma was with the Union regulations that required the newest employees to be reduced rather than those who had been with the County for a longer period of time, regardless of their

work ethics and capabilities. She advised that there were a number of long-standing employees within her Department who failed to work to their full capacity, but would continue to retain their positions regardless of the staff reductions made due to their seniority, forcing her to layoff newer employees who were fulfilling their employee obligations as required. Ms. Weaver said that she had spoken with her supervisory staff and advised them that evaluations needed to be utilized as a tool in order to ensure that proper disciplinary actions were instituted for employees not performing at an acceptable level. She noted that this was a time consuming process which would not facilitate the elimination of non-performing staff overnight. Ms. Weaver suggested that another method might be to institute a peer review process which would allow other staff members, rather than supervisory staff, to report on those individuals who were not performing their fair share of the work.

Discussion ensued.

Mr. Payne noted that Ms. Weaver had been directed to reduce her staff by three positions and he questioned whether she had chosen a third to be abolished. Ms. Weaver explained that there was currently a Social Welfare Examiner position vacant in the Temporary Assistance Unit which she had received approval to fill; however, she added, she would not have a list of viable candidates for the position until after the promotional exam had been given at the end of the month. Ms. Weaver stated that she preferred to fill the Social Welfare Examiner position by promotion subsequent to the Civil Service testing and then eliminate the position vacated.

Motion was made by Mr. Sheehan, seconded by Mr. Strainer and carried unanimously to authorize Ms. Weaver to delay in determining the third position to be eliminated from her department until after the promotional exam had been given and the Social Welfare Examiner position was filled.

Concluding the agenda review, Ms. Weaver presented the listing of items pending from prior Committee meetings which she detailed as follows:

1. With respect to the administering of methadone treatments within the area beginning in September of 2009, Ms. Weaver apprised that Mr. Payne had set up a meeting for the following afternoon with groups interested in providing treatments. Mr. Payne interjected that initially Whitney Young had been the only organization interested in providing the treatments; however, he added, there had recently been interest from other groups with whom they planned to speak in order to determine the best candidate for the services. Mr. Merlino questioned why the services could not be performed at the Glens Falls Hospital and Mr. Payne replied that the Hospital had not been interested in providing these services due to the disparaging nature of the client base that would be served;
2. Ms. Weaver advised that the County Attorney's Office had contacted Washington County to determine the legal unit of caseloads, but had not contacted any others. She said that she would provide further information when it became available.

As there was no further business to come before the Social Services Committee, on motion made by Mr. Strainer and seconded by Mr. Sheehan, Mr. Tessier adjourned the meeting at 10:45 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Amanda Allen, Sr. Legislative Office Specialist