WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: SOCIAL SERVICES

DATE: JUNE 28, 2007

Committee Members Present:
Supervisors Tessier
O'Connor
Bentley
Kenny
F. Thomas

Committee Members Absent:
Supervisors Sheehan
Mason

Others Present:
Representing Department of Social Services:
Robert Phelps, Commissioner
Michael Jabaut, Director, Administrative Svces.
Kathy Baker, Fiscal Manager
William Thomas, Chairman
Hal Payne, Commissioner, Administrative & Fiscal Services
Joan Sady, Clerk, Board of Supervisors
Todd Lunt, Director, Human Resources
Katy Goodman, Secretary to the Clerk

Mr. Tessier called the Social Services Committee meeting to order at 9:34 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Kenny, seconded by Mr. Bentley and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the previous meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Robert Phelps, Commissioner of the Department of Social Services, who distributed copies of his Agenda packet for the meeting. A copy of the packet is on file with the minutes. Mr. Phelps noted as part of the Agenda he would be presenting the Department's Annual Report for 2006 to the Committee members.

Pursuant to Agenda Item No. 1, Mr. Phelps requested permission to fill vacancies in the Department of three Social Welfare Examiner positions in the Medicaid Program Unit and a Caseworker position in the Preventive Services Unit. He explained the Examiner positions were vacant because one employee had resigned during their probationary period and another had also resigned. Mr. Phelps advised the positions were 100% reimbursable. A copy of a memorandum from Mr. Phelps to Hal Payne, Commissioner of Administrative and Fiscal Services, which outlined the rationale for the requests was included in the Agenda packet.

Motion was made by Mr. Kenny and seconded by Mr. O'Connor to approve the aforementioned requests, as presented.

Dialogue ensued between Mr. O'Connor and Mr. Phelps on the issue of resignations from the Department. Mr. O'Connor commented in general he did not think there had been too many resignations from the Department during the years he had been a Supervisor. He questioned whether or not the resignations were a trend or was there an underlying cause for them, such as the employees did not like the work or they could not handle it. Mr. Phelps responded the situation was unique to the two individuals who resigned and he did not feel there was a trend

towards resignations. However, Mr. Phelps added, the rules and regulations of the Medicaid Program were very complicated and there was a lot to learn. He stated the Caseworker position was another loss of one of the Department's employees to the Probation Department which was a problem situation.

Mr. O'Connor queried if there was a difference in the grade and pay rate between the two Departments; and Mr. Phelps apprised there was a fairly significant increase for the Probation positions. Mr. Phelps commented he felt the duties and responsibilities of the Social Services positions were more demanding and stressful than for the Probation positions. Mr. O'Connor stated the issue of pay rates for jobs in terms of what a job was actually worth was discussed recently by the Community Action Agency's (Board of Directors). He advised he did not mean that there should be raises across the board; although, he added, perhaps that issue should be addressed at some point in the future. Mr. O'Connor commented the impact on the Department would not be good if they continued to train people just to have them leave.

Mr. Tessier recalled that figures had been provided to the Committee members a while ago on the Department's turnover rate for a year. Mr. Phelps stated the Child Protective Services (CPS) Unit was the most stressful to work in and it was also the one that concerned him the most relative to the County's liability. He noted that five of the Unit's eight Caseworkers had worked in the Unit for less than a year. Mr. Phelps apprised the turnover rate for all Caseworkers in the Department was 45% in two years. He commented the rate was very significant and it concerned him considerably.

Mr. Tessier called the question and the motion to approve the requests to fill the aforementioned positions was carried unanimously and referred to the Personnel/Human Resources Committee. Copies of Notices of Intent to Fill Vacant Positions are on file with the minutes.

Mr. Phelps referred the Committee members to the Overtime Report that was included in the Agenda packet (Item No. 2). He noted the Report covered three payroll periods. Mr. Kenny pointed out that the payroll periods all showed there was a continuous backlog of overtime in the CPS Unit. He stated he thought it might be better to hire someone to keep the work current instead of paying 25 hours of overtime every other pay period. Mr. Phelps advised the backlog was related directly to the aforementioned staff turnover in the Unit and increased Program demands. He explained the few experienced workers in the Unit had to help cover the backlog plus the new staff had to be away from the Office for ten weeks of training and that time also had to be covered. Mr. Kenny queried if the work would get caught up. Mr. Phelps responded if the turnover rate continued at the current level, the backlog of the work and the overtime would continue.

Mr. Phelps advised the backlog of work in the Medicaid Program was also caused by staff turnover and increased Program demands. He stated although the overtime costs were using up the Medicaid allocation the costs were 100% reimbursable. Mr. Phelps explained if there was a shortfall in the funds towards the end of the year he would request an increase in appropriations

and offsetting revenues and there would not be any increase in the County's costs because of the reimbursement.

Dialogue ensued between Mr. Payne and Mr. Phelps relative to the overtime. Mr. Payne queried if Mr. Phelps had ever considered hiring another person in the CPS unit who would work from Noon to 8:00 p.m. Mr. Phelps responded they had explored the use of flexible scheduling for the Unit and the staff did work an extra hour per day from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. However, he stated, a flexible schedule would raise the issue of staff supervision. Mr. Phelps noted there was staff supervision for the current schedule. He explained CPS had to provide coverage 24/7 and much of the overtime was because the reports that required the Unit's services came in at all hours and they had to respond to them immediately. Mr. Payne acknowledged the Unit had to operate 24/7. Perhaps, he said, it should be staffed more than nine hours/day.

Mr. Phelps stated it would be helpful to have a work group which would include a couple of the Committee members and Douglas Herschleb, Director of Services, and himself to look at some different approaches for scheduling the Unit's staff. Mr. Phelps advised a potential problem with having regular staff coverage for night hours was that there might not be any calls on a particular night. Then, he noted, instead of paying on-call pay the full salary would be paid and the staff member would not have responded to any calls. Mr. Phelps stated security issues would also have to be considered if the staff member had to work in the office alone when the building was closed. He advised they would look into the flexible scheduling issue and they would welcome the Committee members' input on it.

Mr. W. Thomas entered the meeting at 9:44 a.m.

Pursuant to Agenda Item No. 3, Mr. Phelps presented a request for approval of an authorization to attend a training event and travel for staff member Melissa Watkins, to travel to Syracuse to attend mandatory CPS Response Training from August 13th through August 17th and from August 27th through August 31st. He noted that Mr. Tessier had copies of the requests to sign, subject to the Committee members' approval.

Motion was made by Mr. O'Connor, seconded by Mr. F. Thomas and carried unanimously to approve the aforementioned request, as presented. Copies of the request and information pertinent thereto are on file with the minutes.

Mr. Phelps noted the last Agenda item (No. 4) was the presentation of the Annual Report for 2006. Copies of the Report were distributed to the Committee members, and a copy is on file with the minutes. He encouraged the Committee members to read the Report carefully as it provided a description of what the Department did, who it served, the number of people it served and the costs of the services. Mr. Phelps noted the Annual Report also included some comparison data for the year 2006 and prior years. He stated if the Committee members had any questions about the Report, they would be glad to answer them now or after the review of the Report at the next Committee meeting.

Mr. Kenny commented it was somewhat difficult to read the Report and ask questions during the meeting. He suggested that the Committee members should read the Report between now and the next meeting and then bring it and their questions back to the next meeting. Mr. Phelps acknowledged the suggestion. He stated for today he had only intended to highlight some of the sections of the Report and if the Committee members wished to bring the Report and their questions back to the next meeting he would have the staff present to answer them.

Mr. Phelps reviewed various sections of the Report in detail with the Committee members. At the conclusion of the review, Mr. Phelps reiterated if the Committee members wished to bring the Report to the next meeting he would be glad to review it further with them.

Mr. O'Connor praised the comprehensiveness of the Annual Report and commended Mr. Phelps and all the Department's staff for such an outstanding Report. Mr. Phelps acknowledged the remarks.

Mr. O'Connor commented on the issue of the status of the (County's) proposed Health & Human Services Building project. He noted in casual conversation with Social Services' employees the question had been raised as to whether the building would ever be built. Mr. O'Connor stated he wanted Mr. Phelps and the two staff members who were present today to know that although it seemed like the Board of Supervisors had been "dragging their feet" on the project that was not the case. He advised the Board had tried to be good caretakers of the taxpayers' money by looking at every possible option for the project that would benefit the Department of Social Services and the County residents who used its services. Mr. O'Connor stated he felt the solution to the situation would be made at the July 6th Special Board of Supervisors' meeting. He noted he was the Vice-chairman of the County Facilities Committee, and the Supervisors were aware of the stress the Department's employees had to work under in the present building. Mr. Phelps expressed his appreciation and that of the staff that a decision would be made soon. They all also appreciated the care the Board of Supervisors had taken to ensure the project was done properly since they were also taxpayers, he added.

Mr. Phelps recognized that the staff members who were present today were Kathy Baker, the Department's Fiscal Manager, and Michael Jabaut, Director of Administrative Services. He noted that Douglas Herschleb, Director of Social Services, was not able to be present today. Mr. Phelps stated the administrative staff would attend the next meeting to answer any questions on the Annual Report. He advised he would also e-mail the Report to the Committee members and the rest of the Board of Supervisors would receive copies of it too.

Mr. F. Thomas questioned if there had been any discussion on the Facilitated Enrollment Program (relative to the Medicaid Program). Mr. Phelps replied there was still support for the Program and the State was still funding it. However, he advised, there were many red flags about the quality of the work being done for the Program and the State was looking carefully at performance measures for the Program. Mr. Phelps commented if the Program were carried out correctly it would benefit the County and if it was done incorrectly it would be more work than it was worth.

He advised they were pressing the (State) Department of Health to make sure the Program was handled properly and if it was not they would take it over themselves.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Todd Lunt, Director of Human Resources. He recalled there had been discussion in a Westmount Health Facility & Countryside Adult Home Committee meeting relative to the issue of the Department of Social Services assisting new patients at Countryside in filing applications to enroll in Medicare/Medicaid Programs for funds to cover their costs at the Home. (Please see the minutes of the June 22, 2007 Westmount Health Facility & Countryside Adult Home Committee meeting for details on this discussion). Mr. Lunt stated part of the discussion had concerned the time line for when the patients would know whether they would qualify for the funds and he had been told that it could take up to 30 days to process the applications. He asked Mr. Phelps if he knew how long the application process would take.

Mr. Phelps replied each case was unique and the more financial resources, other assets or property the applicant had, the longer the process would take. He noted in simple cases where there were no resources other than a fixed income the turnaround would be very quick. Mr. Phelps explained for the more complex applications it also took more time to gather the information needed for the applications. It would help to speed the process along if that work could be facilitated quicker, he added. Mr. Phelps commented he felt if the patients were not admitted until the decision on the funding had been made it would be an incentive to provide the financial information. He advised that one of the problems with the admissions to the Home was that the patients were admitted before it was determined whether or not they were eligible for the funding and then there was not an incentive to provide the fiscal information.

Mr. Tessier recalled part of the Committee's discussion was that they would like to have Social Services review the applications from the Countryside Adult Home first. He advised it was decided that the request would be worked out because there were not too many applications from the Home in a month. Mr. Lunt concurred that was correct. Mr. Phelps responded they expedited the applications to the extent they could. However, he said, if they did not have the information that was needed it would delay the application. Mr. Payne agreed the aforementioned incentive would help move the application process along. Mr. Tessier concluded if it was difficult to obtain the information they did not expect those applications would be put first, but they would like that to be done for any that could be handled immediately.

There being no further business, on motion by Mr. Kenny and seconded by Mr. Bentley, Mr. Tessier adjourned the meeting at 10:15 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Katy Goodman, Secretary to the Clerk