

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: SOCIAL SERVICES

DATE: FEBRUARY 28, 2014

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

SUPERVISORS WESTCOTT
WOOD
SOKOL
FRASIER
STROUGH
VANSELOW
SIMPSON

OTHERS PRESENT:

REPRESENTING THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES:
SUZANNE WHEELER, COMMISSIONER
JULIE MONTERO, FISCAL MANAGER
DEANNA PARK, DIRECTOR OF COUNTRYSIDE ADULT HOME
KEVIN B. GERAGHTY, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD
JOANN MCKINSTRY, ASSISTANT TO THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
JOAN SADY, CLERK OF THE BOARD
FRANK E. THOMAS, BUDGET OFFICER
SUPERVISORS BROCK
CONOVER
MERLINO
SEEBER
TAYLOR
KATHERINE CHAMBERS, YOUTH COURT PROGRAM DIRECTOR
DON LEHMAN, *THE POST STAR*
SAMANTHA HOGAN, LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST
PLEASE SEE ATTACHED SHEET FOR ADDITIONAL MEETING ATTENDEES

Mr. Westcott called the meeting of the Social Services Committee to order at 9:30 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Sokol, seconded by Mrs. Frasier and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the previous meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk of the Board.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Deanna Park, Director of Countryside Adult Home, who distributed copies of the agenda to the Committee members; *a copy of the agenda is on file with the minutes.*

Commencing the Agenda review, Ms. Park requested permission to attend The Empire State Association of Assisted Living Annual Conference that was to be held May 4-7, 2014 in Saratoga Springs, NY, at a cost of \$699.00. She stated this conference attendance would assist with NYSDOH (New York State Department of Health) continuing education credit requirements.

Motion was made by Mr. Vanselow, seconded by Mr. Strough and carried unanimously to approve the travel request, as outlined above. *A copy of the Authorization to Attend Meeting or Convention form is on file with the meeting minutes.*

Continuing, Ms. Park presented a request to fill a vacant Laborer position, (Grade 2, Annual Base Salary of \$24,180) and backfill any vacancies created by promotion. She added that this position helped to meet NYSDOH requirements for both the maintenance and food service regulations; she added that an approximate budget savings of \$8,198 (\$4,009 Local Share) would be achieved due to a decrease in longevity pay.

Motion was made by Ms. Wood, seconded by Mr. Simpson and carried unanimously to fill the vacancy, as outlined above, and refer same to the Personnel Committee. *A copy of the Notice of Intent to Fill Vacant Position form is on file with the minutes.*

Ms. Park stated her final request was for a transfer of funds in the amount of \$2,000.00 from Budget Code A.6030.413 (Repair/Maintenance Bldg./property) to Budget Code A.6030.210 (Furnishings) to purchase a security system to provide additional security for the residents and the facility, itself.

Motion was made by Mrs. Frasier, seconded by Mr. Strough and carried unanimously to approve the request for a transfer of funds and refer same to the Finance Committee. *A copy of the Request for Transfer of Funds is on file with the minutes.*

Ms. Parks then addressed the Topics of Discussion portion of her agenda, reviewing the following statistics:

- Overtime - 112 hours of overtime was used for the past two pay cycles, including holiday pay for Martin Luther King Day; this is an increase of 21.5 hours in comparison to the prior year.
- Current Census - 39 residents; 25 women and 14 men.
- Monthly Statistics - 5 referrals were received, 1 at a skilled level, 1 out of County, 1 currently in rehabilitation, 2 did not show for tour or leave contact information.

In closing, Ms. Park advised there were no admissions or discharges this month.

This concluded the Countryside Adult Home portion of the Committee meeting and the Department of Social Services (DSS) portion commenced at 9:33 a.m.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Suzanne Wheeler, Commissioner of the DSS, who distributed copies of the agenda to the Committee members; *a copy of the agenda is on file with the minutes.*

Commencing the Agenda review Ms. Wheeler announced Tara Kelly, Social Welfare Examiner of the Medicaid Community Unit, as the DSS Player of the Month. She added that Ms. Kelly was unable to attend due to other commitments, but noted that she was a tremendous asset to the Unit.

Moving on to the Information and Education portion of the agenda, Ms. Wheeler introduced Katherine Chambers, Youth Court Program Director, who handed out copies of the Warren County Youth Court 2013 End of Year Report, a copy of which is on file with the minutes. Ms. Chambers reviewed the Report, pointing out there had been a reduction in referrals which accounted for the overall decrease in the number of unduplicated youth. She added that the reduction in referrals, as explained to her by the Probation Department and the Municipal Courts, was due to an overall reduction in juvenile arrests. Ms. Chambers stated that 2013 had been the first year since she had been involved with the program that they had achieved 100% completion. Additionally, she noted 2013 was also the first year that they had not received any referrals for truancy; she advised many schools had been handling truanancies on their own, some better than others, and she apprised that an increase in truancy referrals would happen sooner rather than later as a result. She then informed the Committee that in January of 2013, the Youth Court had received monies from the Warren County Bar Association Foundation to host what is referred to as a Youth Court Immersion meeting for some of the previously trained volunteers, allowing them to receive a secondary, more in-depth and intense training; she added that during this meeting a new Jury Training video that was produced to show students training specifics that applied only to Warren County Courts.

Mr. Vanselow asked if the movement by Governor Cuomo to change the age of criminality would impact the Youth Court program. Ms. Chambers responded that she thought it would increase the number of referrals received to include higher risk cases than would normally be seen. She added that they usually addressed low risk cases and she was now looking into accepting both low and medium risk cases to allow for an increase in Youth Court referrals.

Mr. Westcott thanked Ms. Chambers for all her continued hard work.

Continuing with the Agenda review Ms. Wheeler introduced the Action Items section, outlining Item 5A which listed several contract renewals for the Youth Bureau, all for the term of January 1, 2014 - December 31, 2014, as follows:

- Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Albany for home based parent education - \$3,393;
- Warren-Hamilton Counties ACEO, Inc. for the alternative sentencing program - \$2,296;
- Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Albany dba Catholic Charities of Saratoga, Warren and Washington Counties for youth and family counseling - \$5,311; and
- Council for Prevention of Alcohol & Substance Abuse, Inc. for the Youth Court Program - \$50,875 (*\$17,282 State Share; \$33,593 Local Share*).

Ms. Wood questioned if the Local Share for the Council for Prevention contract was budgeted for 2014 and Ms. Wheeler answered affirmatively.

Motion was made by Mr. Vanselow, seconded by Mr. Simpson and carried unanimously to approve all four of the above referenced contract renewals and the necessary resolutions were authorized for the March 21, 2014 Board Meeting. *Copies of the requests are on file with the minutes.*

Ms. Wheeler said Agenda Item 5B included two requests to appoint members to the Warren County Youth Board, as follows:

- Request to reappoint Phil Goodman, representing the Town of Johnsbury, for the term of March 21, 2014 - December 31, 2014; and
- Request to appoint Sharon Sano, representing the Warren County Employment and Training Administration, for the term March 21, 2014 - December 31, 2014.

Motion was made by Mr. Sokol, seconded by Ms. Wood and carried unanimously to approve both requests, as outlined above, and the necessary resolutions were authorized for the March 21, 2014 Board Meeting. *Copies of both requests are on file with the minutes.*

Moving on to Agenda Item 5C, Ms. Wheeler presented two requests to fill vacant positions. The first, she said, was the Social Services Investigator #3 position, (Grade 11, Base Annual Salary of \$33,687) which had been vacated due to a resignation.

Motion was made by Mrs. Frasier, seconded by Mr. Simpson and carried unanimously to approve the request to fill the vacant Social Services Investigator #3 position and refer same to the Personnel Committee. *A copy of the Notice of Intent to Fill Vacant Position form is on file with the minutes.*

Ms. Wheeler said the next request was for authorization to fill any vacant Caseworker positions in the Child Protective, Adoption/Foster Care, Preventive and Adult Protective Units without prior authorization from the Social Services Committee or the Board of Supervisors. She explained that five staff members from her Department had resigned from Caseworker positions in less than a year and she said it could take up to three months to obtain permission to fill a vacancy, review resumes, interview, and hire. Not to mention, she added, that it could take up to another year for New York State training if it was not available right away. Ms. Wheeler stated that without a full staff, caseloads become higher than regulations allowed and, most importantly, the safety of both adults and children could be compromised. She noted that she had already discussed this proposal with Paul Dusek, County Administrator, and he supported this request. Mr. Westcott stated that what Ms. Wheeler proposed was similar to the authorities provided for filling positions in the Medicaid

Division and at Westmount Health Facility and the Sheriff's Office. Ms. Wheeler apprised there were concerns that so many staff members were leaving the County in favor of higher paying positions and she advised that Gretchen Steffan, County Human Resources Director, would be conducting a Salary Study to determine whether the salaries associated with the Caseworker positions were appropriate.

Ms. Wood questioned whether the Child Protective, Adoption/Foster Care, Preventive and Adult Protective Units were required to have minimum staffing levels like Westmount and the Sheriff's Office and Ms. Wheeler responded affirmatively. Ms. Wood also asked if the County would be reimbursed for any of these positions and Ms. Wheeler confirmed they would, as all of the Caseworker positions received approximately 75% reimbursement. Mr. Westcott asked if an authorization form would have to be signed by the County Administrator, County Attorney and the Chairman of the Committee in order to fill a position, as well as whether a reporting on the positions filled would be provided to the Social Services Committee. Ms. Wheeler responded in the negative stating that she could discuss vacancies filled with the Chairman, the County Administrator and the County Human Resources Director, but said she did not believe that any documents needed to be signed other than the typical Personnel 426 form required by the Civil Service Office when filling positions.

Ms. Seeber recalled a prior resolution had been passed in September regarding the filling of positions in the Medicaid Unit without seeking prior Committee approval and she said she was unclear as to why something would need to be passed for the Department of Social Services as a whole. Ms. Wheeler responded that this authorization would applied to solely for Caseworker positions and not for Examiner, Clerical or Investigator positions. She continued that the DSS staff included 155 employees (including Countryside), 37 of which were Caseworkers, Senior Caseworkers or Supervisors of Caseworkers and she noted these staff members were responsible for vulnerable adults and children. Ms. Wheeler then referenced a handout included in the Agenda which indicated there had been 12 Caseworker vacancies in her Department since the spring of 2013 attributed to resignations, retirements, promotions and unit transfers; she pointed out that the majority were due to resignations for higher paying positions. Ms. Seeber asked if Ms. Wheeler believed that the reason behind the vacancies was primarily related to salary issues and Ms. Wheeler replied affirmatively. Ms. Seeber asked if Westmount was the only other department filling vacancies in this way and Ms. Wheeler responded that the Sheriff's Office was using this practice, as well.

Mr. Strough commented the request was to give Ms. Wheeler the ability to quickly fill future Caseworker vacancies, the majority of which appeared to be occurring due to what were thought to be low salary levels, and Ms. Wheeler confirmed this was a correct assessment. Mr. Strough noted this authorization would do nothing to fix the salary issue at hand and he questioned whether alternate action would be taken to address the matter in the future; Ms. Wheeler stated that the salary study to be performed by the County Human Resources Director would assist with this situation.

Mr. Taylor suggested the request be tabled until the salary study was complete. Mr. Westcott asked when the study would be available and JoAnn McKinstry, Assistant to the County Administrator, answered that she had spoken with Ms. Steffan who indicated the Salary Study should be completed by the next Social Services Committee meeting. Ms. Wood said she agreed with Mr. Taylor's suggestion to table the request in light of the fact that this seemed to be a long-standing issue which was new to the Committee. Mr. Strough advised that he would not be against tabling the request as long as it was not going to hinder the DSS staff.

Motion was made by Mr. Taylor and seconded by Ms. Wood to table the request to authorize the Commissioner of the DSS to fill Caseworker vacancies without prior Committee approval; however, due to a lack of majority vote, the motion failed.

Mrs. McKinstry asked if Ms. Wheeler had the ability to hire Temporary Caseworkers. Ms. Wheeler responded that they did in the instance of a Maternity Leave, once an employees available sick time was exhausted. Mrs. McKinstry noted that if the DSS Budget included a temporary help line item, they could use temporary help to fill the position until the approval process was complete; she added this might provide an immediate solution the next Committee meeting. Ms. Wheeler stated this was a valid suggestion, but advised she knew of only one former Caseworker that had retired and would come back to work on a temporary basis, and that person could not work in the Child Protective Services Unit. Mr. Westcott presented a suggestion from Joan Sady, Clerk of the Board, that Ms. Wheeler's request be amended to apply only to the time period extending from today until the next Committee meeting in order to provide assistance until the results of the salary study were complete. Mr. Conover pointed out that he could not recall a time when the Committee had not approved the filling of a vacant DSS position for which funding was budgeted, and Ms. Wheeler agreed.

Motion was made by Mr. Simpson, seconded by Mr. Vanselow and carried by majority vote, with Ms. Wood and Mrs. Frasier voting in opposition, to authorize the Commissioner of the DSS to fill vacant Caseworker positions in the Child Protective, Adoption/Foster Care, Preventive and Adult Protective Units without prior Committee authorization, for the term of February 28, 2014 - March 28, 2014, and to refer same to the Personnel Committee. *A copy of the request on file with the minutes.*

The Agenda review concluded with a review of Item 6, Other, as follows:

1. Overtime Report - Ms. Wheeler advised the Overtime Report was included in the agenda packet. She noted that overtime use was still high in the Medicaid Unit, due to the increase in Medicaid applications and State regulations that required more work of her staff. Ms. Wheeler said she had one more vacancy to fill in the Medicaid Unit which she felt would help to get things back on track.
2. Budget Status Report - Julie Montero, DSS Fiscal Manager, noted the agenda included copies of the 2013 Budget Revenue and Expense Report which showed both expenses and revenues were under budget, but noted these were good results. Ms. Montero advised a copy of the 2014 Budget Revenue and Expense Report were also included in the agenda packet, but noted that most of the expenses shown were for costs incurred in 2013.

Mr. Westcott asked how deficits in the 2013 Budget would impact the overall County Budget, questioning whether these were savings for the County or simply reductions in the amount of State Funding. Ms. Montero advised the County would receive less State and Federal dollars, but local share expenses would decrease, as well, positively impacting the County Budget.

3. Monthly Statistics - Ms Wheeler gave an overview of the Monthly Case and Individual Statistics report included in the agenda packet, noting that it did not include figures for Recovery, Fraud or Support Collection. She said she had also included a glossary of the acronyms used by the DSS, as well as documentation showing various stages of approval to indicate the number of times each application had to be reviewed.

Mr. Westcott stated that it seemed there was an increase in the caseload numbers and he asked Ms. Wheeler to summarize how this affected the departmental budget, overtime use and work hours. Ms. Wheeler replied that it was only the beginning of the year and she did not foresee any budget issues, at this time. Mr. Westcott questioned whether they were able to handle the workload at the

current staffing levels and Ms. Wheeler answered that she believed that they could, but added that in the future she might have to request additional Social Welfare Examiner positions. Ms. Wheeler concluded that currently, she did not foresee a staffing problem, and provided that Medicaid operations transitioned to the State as they were supposed to, she might be able to transfer some of the Social Welfare Examiners over to other units where there had been a caseload increase.

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

Respectfully Submitted,
Samantha Hogan, Legislative Office Specialist