



Families Task Force

BOL Meeting Minutes - Published Draft

Task Force Co-Chairs:
Catherine Borgia & Kathy Halas

800 Michaelan Office Bldg.
148 Martine Avenue, 8th Floor
White Plains, NY 10601
www.westchesterlegislators.com

Thursday, October 7, 2021

10:00 AM

Committee Room

CALL TO ORDER

The County Board will meet pursuant to Chapter 417 of New York State Laws of 2021, allowing public bodies to meet and take action without permitting in-person public access to meetings and authorizes such meetings and public hearings to be held remotely by conference call or similar service, provided the public has the ability to view or listen and that such meetings are recorded and later transcribed. To access the meeting, please visit: <https://westchestercountyny.legistar.com>

With a quorum present, Co-Chair Halas called the meeting to order at 10:05 AM.

Others in Attendance: Y. Valencia, Kathy Halas

Remote: Legislators Barr and Woodson-Samuels, Carolyn Flunkinger, Carola Bracco, John Befus, Susan Weisman, Erica William Woodley, Michael Orth, Rachel Halprin, Garah Kader, Anietra Guzman Santana, Jennifer Castelhana, Rose Noonan, Faith Ann Butcher, Luis Leon, Aviva Meyer, Stan Sheppard, Virginia Foulkrod, Tamika Coverdale, Shirley Acevda Buontempo, Darlene Reda, Sonia Elliot, Esperalda Hoscoy, Cindy Kanusher, Melanie Montalto, Jan Fisher, Krista Brodigan, Marie Considine, Marcia Spencer

Present Chairperson Catherine Borgia

Absent Legislator Benjamin Boykin, Legislator Christopher Johnson, Legislator Damon Maher, Legislator Ruth Walter, and Legislator Alfreda Williams

Remote Legislator Nancy Barr

MINUTES APPROVAL

I. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Kinship Housing

Guests:

Jennifer Castelhan
Director of Constituent Services
Office of New York State Senator Peter Harckham

Rose Noonan
Executive Director
Housing Action Council

Carolyn Fluckinger
Director, Kinship Support Program
Family Service Society of Yonkers

Ms. Halas opened the meeting and welcomed everyone, Legislator Borgia discussed the benefits on kinship housing and mentioned that the need is growing in Westchester County. The task force has been discussing this issue since its onset. The children who are in kinship care versus the children in forced care with people to whom are not related have a better successful outcome. It saves the county money and it provides better care for these students. High school graduation rates of children in the program were about 10 points higher. Legislator Borgia introduced Ms. Noonan, she went on to discuss the issues at hand. Ms. Noonan discussed that most developments that have happened in recent years, involve a substantial amount of funding from New York State. She mentioned that county funding alone is not enough for this type of housing. Over the years the state has prioritized certain types of housing for homeless families, for persons with mental disabilities and those who are physically challenged. Because of the states priorities, housing that meets a special needs population, kinship housing is not. Another policy issue that she mentioned is that New York State allocates tax credits which are both federal and state tax credits which fund affordable housing, investors buy these tax credits and money flows in. The US treasury regulation will allow for special needs housing, if the state identifies as a special need as a priority interest or a special needs interest in this type of housing. Kinship housing is not identified as a state special needs population. Ms. Noonan explained that prioritizing families who have a need for kinship, housing would not be possible with this major source of funding. At the last task force meeting discussion of services and case management services, having a facility who would provide services to others not living there. Legislator Borgia mentioned that NYC has different abilities than the rest of the state and the nature of its own land, the Bronx model was financially possible due to this. Ms. Castelhan recommended a legislative policy stand point change to be able to make it easier to have state funding. Support from the Westchester delegation is important to bring attention to this need. Mr. Befus mentioned that this model aligns with the family federal family first legislation, which became in effect on September 29. This requires social service districts to reduce their number of children in foster care, congregate care and increase the number of children of a normal family, foster care, kinship foster care. Legislator Borgia mentioned if an add to the capital or operational budget would facilitate this process, she will look into this. Ms. Flunkinger mentioned that there are approximately 7500 kinship families in Westchester, including 5000 grandparents raising grandchildren and more than half are over the age of 60 and nearly 70% are female. Most are low income and 92% do not receive benefits for which they're are entitled to. The numbers are growing, especially in immigrant communities and are expected to increase due to the pandemic. Ms. Flunkinger was a board member with the Bronx housing, she mentioned there

is a one other project in NYC, the Calvary grandparents residence in Jamaica, Queens. The task force will plan a future trip to visit these site and find out more information.

2. Covid-19 Vaccine Update

- pop ups
- infection rates
- breakthrough cases
- child infection rates
- child mask mandate of 2 years and up

Guest:

Aviva Meyer

Director of Policy and Programs Health and Infrastructure
Office of the County Executive

Dial Hewlett Jr., MD., FACP, FIDSA

Division of Disease Control

Westchester County Department of Health

Ms. Meyer introduced herself and mentioned that Dr. Hewlett had another commitment to attend to and introduced Ms. Williams-Woodley and Farah Kader, Public Health Nurse with the Department of Health and a research analyst. Ms. Meyer briefly went over current numbers of covid cases in the county which started in September with the Delta variant. The current vaccination rate for the county is at 89.9% for adults with at least one shot and 69% of children 12-15 years old. The county has received funding to partner with private and public schools for testing K through 12 and this program is underway. Various pop up locations have been set up around the county closer to where people are. Ms. Williams-Woodley and Ms. Kader joined the county in the summer of 2020 to help with response to covid, they have received a grant from Health and Humane services to help increase health literacy and underserved communities. Ms. Kader went over a power point in which the Biden Administration allocated \$250 million to the Department of Health and Human Services Office on Minority Health in which it would distribute a maximum of \$4 million to local jurisdictions (city/county). It aimed to advance health literacy, reduce COVID disparities, reduce racial/ethnic disparities, make programs applicable to future health issues, work with a minority servicing institution to provide program evaluations and partner with community based organizations.

3. Mental Health Guidance Post-Covid Awareness

Guest:

Michael Orth

Commissioner

Westchester County Department of Community Mental Health

Commissioner Orth was introduced and mentioned he recently presented to the New York State Association for counties in Syracuse a few weeks ago on the response to the pandemic on mental health, emotional wellness and substance abuse. Everyone pulling together from stakeholders, schools, faith base and non profits. He went on to mention there was a public health crisis when it comes to mental health and substance abuse before the pandemic, and the pandemic made things even more challenging. He expressed concern over the system being overwhelmed in terms of the need and the response to the community. The need for more awareness that some of our residents will not engage in informed treatment, whether it's stigma or other stressors. A major issue that was highlighted during the pandemic was private insurance. Many residents never checked their health insurance policy thinking they never would use that piece of the plan limiting their opportunity, their co-pay, the deductions was overwhelming to many.

II. OTHER BUSINESS

III. RECEIVE & FILE

ADJOURNMENT

The task force adjourned at 11:37 AM.