



Budget & Appropriations

BOL Meeting Minutes - Final

Committee Chair: Catherine Borgia

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

Friday, November 19, 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, Chair Borgia called the meeting to order at 10:15 AM.

Present: Committee Chair Borgia and Legislator Barr

Absent: Committee Vice-Chair Gashi

Remote: Legislator Boykin, Legislator Cunzio, Legislator Johnson, Legislator Maher, Legislator Parker, Legislator Tubiolo, Legislator Walter, Legislator Williams and Legislator Woodson-Samuels

MINUTES APPROVAL

Friday, November 12, 2021 10 AM Minutes

On motion of Legislator Barr, seconded by Legislator Parker, the minutes were approved. The motion carried unanimously.

I. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

10:00 AM - Department of Social Services

Guests: Commissioner Leonard Townes, First Deputy Commissioner John Befus, Deputy Commissioner Rosa Boone, Deputy Commissioner Derrick Hinds, Deputy Commissioner Katrina Alexander, Associate Commissioner Jane Velazquez, HR Director Valerie Raynor, Budget Manager Tom Rooney, Fiscal Operations Manager Adriano Bratta and Budget Specialist Biji Kuruvila

Commissioner Townes appeared before the Committee with his team from the Department of Social Services to present their 2022 Executive Proposed Budget. Chair Borgia asked how many vacant positions are there? FDC Befus responded that there were 161 vacancies at the start of the month. He noted that the buyout significantly impacted that last year with 91 individuals opting to retire. Prior to that, they were down to roughly 60 vacancies. The Department hires roughly 100 staff annually with a net reduction due to increased retirements (40+ to date this year). They also promote staff, as many as 50% of fills/hires are promotions

(resulting in vacancies), also covid has affected hiring/working. Chair Borgia asked if the Department has new people to hire backfill and if there is a sense of how many are in that pipeline? FDC Befus responded that there are 50 approved lines they hope to fill and the vacant lines each have a specific function. He discussed that as we come out of the pandemic, caseloads that have artificially declined because of COVID when we get back to normal the Department will need more staff to cover the caseload. Chair Borgia discussed evictions and asked how we are going to deal with it? Commissioner Townes discussed the ERAP program and said that they have to look at shelter stock. He also noted that they are looking to meet with partners who are building housing in Westchester. Chair Borgia stated that we knew housing costs in Westchester were unsustainable and that it seems like COVID has accelerated this problem. She asked what are the opportunities for dealing with this issue? FDC Befus responded that a significant portion goes to paying people's rent and other associated costs. He noted that investment into homeless shelters may help to mitigate that challenge. Chair Borgia asked if the drop in numbers at homeless shelters during the pandemic was representative of what happened? FDC Befus responded that in 2019 they averaged 236 individuals per night, which declined in 2020 due to people being more hesitant to congregate. Chair Borgia asked if we had any COVID outbreaks with the drop-ins? FDC Befus responded that they worked with shelters to provide PPE, implement NYSDOH protocols, and were very successful at preventing outbreaks. They created a 39-unit COVID isolation unit in Elmsford for those who needed to be quarantined. He noted that over 600 residents used that facility, which is closed now, and they are managing with smaller units.

Legislator Walter asked if the Department's expenses go up as the homeless population increases or is it a fixed cost irrespective of how many are using those services? FDC Befus responded that it is a fixed cost, but it is an occupancy issue. He discussed that food costs go up but staffing facilities and other associated costs all stay the same. Legislator Maher asked if the Department had to make physical changes at the homeless shelters and did we have a time where demand exceeded capacity? FDC Befus responded that they worked with state agencies to do this at the start of the pandemic. He noted that due to reduced demand they were able to do this. They have the capacity to expand but have not had to turn anyone away. Chair Borgia asked about the cost of County police and the services they provide to the Department? FDC Befus responded that most of the cost is having officers in their six offices where they provide security and support, and they also have some patrol costs. Mr. Grande stated that the cost for this Department is 10.4 million. Chair Borgia asked what happened to kids who were in possibly tenuous situations? FDC Befus responded that at the start of the pandemic they did see a significant decrease in those cases, but they continued to investigate, conduct outreach efforts and preventative measures. He noted that once kids went back to school those numbers returned to normal levels. Legislator Barr asked about kinship care and whether they get foster care payments? FDC Befus responded that the kinship program now gets the full subsidy, DSS reviews/approves them, but now they are eligible whereas previously they had to adopt or rely on TANF.

Legislator Barr asked about what we can do to ensure that children have positive experiences at an earlier age? FDC Befus responded that they have been fortunate in Westchester to be able to fully invest in childcare relative to other districts. He noted that this has resulted in additional block grant funding. Legislator Cunzio asked if there is a policy for those receiving benefits to be vaccinated or has there been any discussion about that? Commissioner Townes responded no, and no there has not been. Legislator Maher asked if there has been education

about the benefits of getting vaccinated? FDC Befus responded yes they have been working with the DOH.

II. OTHER BUSINESS

III. RECEIVE & FILE

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Legislator Barr, seconded by Legislator Maher, the Committee adjourned at 12:44 PM.