

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: SOCIAL SERVICES

DATE: JANUARY 26, 2007

Committee Members Present:

Supervisors Tessier  
Sheehan  
Bentley  
Kenny  
F. Thomas  
Mason

Others Present:

Representing Department of Social Services:  
Robert Phelps, Commissioner  
Douglas Herschleb, Director of Services  
Michael Jabaut, Director, Administrative Svces.  
Paul Dusek, County Attorney  
Joan Sady, Clerk, Board of Supervisors  
Hal Payne, Administrator, Westmount Health  
Facility/ Countryside Adult Home  
Supervisor Caimano, Budget Officer  
Supervisor Geraghty  
Supervisor VanNess  
JoAnn McKinstry, Confidential Secretary,  
Commissioner, Administrative & Fiscal Svces.  
Katy Goodman, Secretary to the Clerk

Committee Member Absent:

Supervisor O'Connor

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Mr. Tessier called the Social Services Committee meeting to order at 10:50 a.m.

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

Privilege of the floor was extended to Mr. Phelps, who distributed copies of his agenda packet for the meeting and the Department's Annual Statistical Report for 2006 (a supplement to the Annual Report). Copies of the items are on file with the minutes.

Mr. Phelps commenced with review of the agenda and he spoke first on the Pending Items. The first item, he pointed out, concerned review of the job specifications for CPS (Child Protective Services) Caseworkers. Mr. Phelps advised the specifications were still under review and as this was an issue that was out there, he was not sure if the matter should be carried as a Pending Item. He stated they had looked at how other districts were handling these positions and most were staying with Caseworker titles because that allowed them to move staff laterally among the four services' program areas. Mr. Phelps confirmed for Mr. Tessier that the item could be removed from the Pending Item list for now and they could raise it again later when needed.

The second Pending Item, Mr. Phelps said, concerned the State Training Schools retroactive rate increase. He reported they were still waiting for possible action by the State on the forgiveness of the rate increase prior to 2006. However, Mr. Phelps advised, at this point it appeared the County would likely be obligated to pay the increase at least for the 2006 amount. He apprised at this time the 2006 bills had been paid and they would be adjusting the fourth quarter of 2006

based on the prior rate, pending a resolution of the issue. Mr. Phelps noted he thought there was legal action pending to see what the State was going to do, and he deferred the question to Paul Dusek, County Attorney, who was present at the meeting.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Mr. Dusek, and he confirmed that he was monitoring the situation. He advised he would be meeting with County Attorneys from some other Social Services Districts next week and he would see what their Counties were going to do about the matter.

Mr. Phelps reported as an informational item for the Committee, the Westmount Health Facility & Countryside Adult Home Committee had met today just before this meeting, and they had approved a transfer of funds to cover the replacement of the windows at the Countryside Adult Home.

Pursuant to Agenda Item No. 1, Request for permission to Fill Vacancies due to resignations, transfers and a retirement, Mr. Phelps referred the Committee members to the agenda packet and he pointed out it included copies of memorandums to Joan Parsons, Commissioner of Administrative & Fiscal Services, requesting her approval of several personnel requests in keeping with the County's procedures on filling positions.

Mr. Phelps commenced with review of the requests, the first of which he said, were outlined in the memo to Mrs. Parsons dated January 12, 2007. He stated the requests were to fill the vacant positions of a Preventive Services Caseworker, a Temporary Assistance Social Welfare Examiner and a Medicaid Examiner for Third Party Health/Disability Review and Managed Care Enrollment. Mr. Phelps reviewed the requests in detail with the Committee members as outlined in the memorandum. Copies of Notice of Intent to Fill Vacant Positions for the items are attached to the memorandum.

At the conclusion of the review of the requests, Mr. Phelps confirmed for Mr. Tessier that the positions would not be backfilled and that they would be filled from the Civil Service list. Dialogue ensued between Mr. Dusek and Mr. Phelps regarding the (employee's) Union contract procedures for posting the vacancies. Mr. Phelps explained the contract only required that the vacancies be posted internally if they were provisional appointments. Mr. Dusek acknowledged the information.

Relative to the vacant position in the Temporary Assistance Unit, Mr. Caimano referred to the aforementioned Annual Statistical Report (Page 23) which he stated showed that the County's Temporary Assistance caseload had reached the lowest level in over 31 years. He asked if that had been taken into consideration relative to filling the position. Mr. Phelps replied he had done that. He explained the front end of the situation was that the volume of applications being received for temporary assistance were the same and as consistently high as they had been since 1999. He stated where the County benefitted the most was that the examiners diverted many of the applicants from receiving the cash assistance by finding them employment. Mr. Tessier noted the aforementioned Report would be discussed later in the meeting.

Discussion returned to the requests to fill the aforementioned vacancies. Mr. Phelps advised that Mrs. Parsons had approved that they be moved forward.

The next request, Mr. Phelps stated was to fill a vacant Social Welfare Examiner position in the Day Care Unit in the event of a lateral transfer (to the aforementioned Social Welfare Examiner position in the Medicaid Unit assigned to Third Party Health/Disability Review and Managed Care Enrollment). He referred the Committee members to the copy of a memorandum to Mrs. Parsons, dated January 16, 2007, which outlined this request. He reviewed the background and justification for the request in detail with the Committee members. Mr. Phelps advised that Mrs. Parsons had also approved this request.

Mr. Phelps reviewed the third memorandum to Mrs. Parsons, which he noted was dated January 22, 2007. He advised the Head Welfare Examiner position in the Medicaid Program would become vacant at the end of February due to the retirement of Winefred Martin after 33.5 years of service to the County. Mr. Phelps stated the position managed the entire Medicaid Program. He explained he expected to fill the vacancy by the promotion of an employee who was a Principal Social Welfare Examiner and then to backfill that vacant position by the promotion of a Senior Welfare Examiner. Then, Mr. Phelps stated that vacancy would be backfilled by the promotion of a Welfare Examiner and lastly, to backfill that vacancy from the CSEA (Civil Services Employee Association) list. He apprised all the positions were 100% reimbursable through the Medicaid Program.

Mr. Phelps confirmed for Mr. Kenny that the changes in the Preventive Services Caseworker, Temporary Assistance Social Welfare Examiner, Medicaid Third Party Health Examiner and the Head Welfare Examiner positions affected a total of eight positions.

Mr. Kenny stated he thought the Committee was going to entertain discussion on a new position in the Social Services Department, and he asked if it would be possible to merge one of the aforesaid positions with the new position. Mr. Kenny confirmed for Mr. Tessier he thought the new position was to be a Deputy Commissioner of Social Services. Mr. Tessier responded he did not think any action had been taken on the position yet. Joan Sady, Clerk, Board of Supervisors, advised the position had been funded in the 2007 County Budget. Mr. Tessier stated the creation of the position had not been discussed, however, it could be. Mr. Kenny noted perhaps it should be discussed. Mr. Tessier noted he did not think any of the positions being discussed would fit the Deputy Commissioner category. Mr. Phelps explained the Medicaid Examiner position was a working supervisor who was dedicated full-time to the Medicaid Program and had specific responsibilities and oversight of other staff. He concurred with Mr. Tessier that if the position was split the 100% reimbursement would be lost. Mr. Kenny acknowledged the position should be discussed separately.

Motion was made by Mr. Mason and seconded by Mr. Sheehan to approve the aforementioned personnel requests, as presented.

Mr. F. Thomas queried if it might be possible to eliminate any of those positions. Mr. Phelps responded he had looked at that possibility, but he did not think that would be advisable as these positions were the "gate keepers" who helped to contain program costs. He cited the example that the local share of the costs for the Temporary Assistance Social Welfare Examiner position was the equivalent of 3.8 cases. If, he explained, a position was eliminated and the position's caseload increased by that number it would cost the County for anything beyond that. Relative to the Medicaid positions, Mr. Phelps stated with the 100% reimbursement it would not benefit the County to eliminate them. He noted the only opportunity to save County funds on the Medicaid side was if they could get in under the Cap and they were trying desperately to contain all the program costs including those for Medicaid. Mr. Phelps commented they hoped to perhaps obtain that goal at some point. Mr. Tessier remarked over the last few years they were getting to that point.

Mr. Tessier called the question and the motion was carried unanimously. The requests were referred to the Personnel Committee. Copies of Notice of Intent to Fill Vacant Position for the items are attached to the aforementioned memorandum.

Mr. Phelps stated Agenda Item No. 2 was a request for a lunch reimbursement limit exception for two new Child Protective Services (CPS) Caseworkers, who had to attend State-mandated CPS Core training in New York City. He apprised the lunch reimbursement allowance in the County's CSEA contract was \$7.00. However, Mr. Phelps stated, he did not believe that would be enough to buy lunch in New York City. Mr. Kenny said he thought General Services Administration (GSA) allowances were going to be used or, he asked, if that was just for hotel costs. Mr. Dusek advised the GSA allowance was to be used just for travel that was not affected by the CSEA contract. However, he stated, these positions were under the CSEA contract that had the aforementioned \$7.00 limit. Mr. Dusek advised if the Committee members wished, in this case they could authorize the use of the GSA contract reimbursement limit. Then, he said, he could contact the CSEA to make sure that was acceptable to them and the reimbursement allowance could be paid in this one instance.

Discussion continued, and Mr. Kenny stated he felt the GSA limit should be allowed. Mr. Phelps advised he had a list of the GSA allowances and they were very liberal so he would not recommend using them. He apprised the allowance for lunch in New York City was \$18.00 and in view of the County budget constraints on travel and reimbursement, he thought they could come up with a reasonable figure for the exception. Mr. VanNess asked if the CSEA contract would have to be opened to renegotiate the reimbursement limit. Mr. Dusek advised he would propose that he contact John Premo, the County's CSEA representative, regarding the matter. He stated he would tell Mr. Premo that this was an isolated case of two individuals and that they would like a letter-form agreement that the County would pay extra this one time and that there was not a precedent for this situation. Mr. Dusek stated he would ask the Union to sign off on the exception. If, he said, the CSEA agreed then the additional amount could be paid.

Mr. Kenny and Mr. Tessier asked about the time frame for the training. Mr. Phelps responded that

the Caseworkers would be starting ten weeks of training on Monday, January 29<sup>th</sup>. However, he explained, they only had to go to New York City every other week for a total of five weeks. Mr. Tessier concluded that would be a total of at least 25 days. Mr. Dusek noted it seemed Mr. Phelps did not like the GSA allowances. Mr. Phelps responded it was up to the Committee members whether or not to allow the GSA amount. Mr. Tessier asked about the costs for the employees' breakfasts and dinners; and Mr. Phelps advised they would be covered by the State. Mr. Dusek commented from his experience with meal costs in New York City, he thought they would be doing well to buy lunch for \$18.00. Mr. Phelps acknowledged the comment. He noted his budget could not handle such amounts on a regular basis. Mr. Phelps stated he had not put a fixed amount in his resolution request form, and if anyone wanted to review the GSA allowances he had the information with him.

Motion was made by Mr. Kenny and seconded by Mr. Bentley to approve the lunch reimbursement limit exception based on the GSA meal reimbursement rate of \$18.00 for lunch, for two CPS Caseworkers while participating in training in New York City, contingent upon approval by the CSEA.

Mr. Dusek clarified the \$18.00 rate was just a cap and the employees would not be given that amount and they would be required to provide receipts for their lunches.

Mr. Tessier called the question, and the motion was carried unanimously. The necessary resolution was authorized for the next board meeting. A copy of a revised resolution request form is on file with the minutes.

Pursuant to Agenda Item No. 3, Mr. Phelps proceeded with the presentation of the aforementioned 2006 Annual Report Supplement. He noted the Committee members would recall that he had created this Report last year and that it had been presented to them in February of 2006. Mr. Phelps commented as they were aware the Department's Annual Report was a comprehensive report that was usually prepared by mid-year and that it described all the programs and services administered by the Department.

Mr. Caimano left the meeting at 11:00 a.m.

Mr. Kenny suggested instead of having the Report read to them, the Committee members should take it home to read and then they could discuss it at the next meeting. Mr. Phelps responded he was just going to briefly highlight the Report and let the Committee members read it at their convenience. He advised he would be glad to answer any questions on it at the next meeting. There was not enough time today to review the Report in-depth, he added.

Mr. Phelps stated the purpose of the Report was to provide a comparison of how the Department was doing compared to other districts of similar size in the State.

As Mr. Phelps proceeded to highlight the Report, he referred the Committee members to the

statistical charts of the information that followed each section of the Report.

Mr. Phelps reviewed the Temporary Assistance section of the Report (pages 22 - 37). He recalled that Mr. Caimano had pointed out earlier in the meeting the Department had achieved an incredibly important and historic milestone when it reduced the Temporary Assistance caseload for 2006 to its lowest level in 31 years. Mr. Phelps advised this was due to welfare reform and the efforts of the staff in the Public Assistance and Employment Units through which program applicants were diverted to jobs with wages and other programs such as Food Stamps and HEAP (Home Energy Assistance Program). He elaborated on how this benefitted both the clients and the Program. Mr. Phelps noted the reduction was also a significant achievement despite the fact that the volume of applications had not changed over the last six or seven years. The decline in the caseload was shown in the chart on page 27, he said. Mr. Phelps apprised as a result of the decline in the caseload, there had been staff reductions over that period in the Temporary Assistance Unit by moving staff into the Units that those clients were being moved into.

Mr. Geraghty left the meeting at 11:15 a.m.

Mr. Phelps pointed out the remaining charts on the Temporary Assistance Unit (pages 33, 35 and 37) outlined the high rankings the County had achieved as a result of the caseload reduction.

At the conclusion of his review of the remaining sections of the Report, Mr. Phelps reiterated if the Committee members would like, he would be glad to review it further at the next meeting. He stated in the meantime, if they had any questions they would like him to answer at the next meeting he could be reached by telephone or e-mail.

Pursuant to Agenda Item No. 4, Budget Performance Report and Overtime Report, Mr. Phelps spoke first on the Budget Performance Report. Copies of the Reports were included in the agenda packet. He stated in keeping with the County's request that all Departments provide those Reports, he had e-mailed it to the Committee members and he had extra copies if anyone needed one. Mr. Phelps noted the Report did not contain much information because it was only January.

Mr. Phelps referred the Committee members to the Overtime Report and he elaborated on various aspects of the data for the information of the Committee members.

Lastly, Mr. Phelps stated he had provided a Report on the Department's telephone activity for 2006, which he pointed out was only for incoming calls to the 300 line. He noted the average number of calls monthly was 3600 and 39,000 to the Departments. In addition, Mr. Phelps noted the Report also included the statistics for the Building Security Report for 2006.

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There being no further business, on motion by Mr. Mason and seconded by Mr. Bentley, Mr. Tessier adjourned the meeting at 11:26 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Katy Goodman, Secretary to the Clerk