

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: **SOCIAL SERVICES**

DATE: February 20, 2007

**Committee Members Present:**

Supervisors Tessier  
O'Connor  
Sheehan  
Bentley  
Kenny  
F. Thomas

**Others Present:**

Robert Phelps, Commissioner, Department of Social Services  
Joan Parsons, Commissioner of Administrative & Fiscal Services  
Paul Dusek, County Attorney  
Nicholas Caimano, Budget Officer  
Joan Sady, Clerk of the Board  
Debra L. Schreiber, Legislative Office Specialist

**Committee Member Absent:**

Supervisor Mason

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Mr. Tessier called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Robert Phelps, Commissioner, Department of Social Services (DSS), who distributed copies of his Agenda to the Committee members, and a copy of same is on file with the minutes.

Mr. Phelps began by reminding the Committee this special meeting was scheduled to discuss the four Medicaid positions (Head Welfare Examiner, Principal Social Welfare Examiner, Senior Social Welfare Examiner and Social Welfare Examiner) that were tabled at the previous meeting, as well as the Deputy Commissioner position that was created in the 2007 budget. He related it was his recollection the Committee expressed the desire to merge the duties of the Head Welfare Examiner with the duties of the Deputy Commissioner of Social Services; however, he said, that would not be his recommendation as there would be no fiscal benefit to Warren County. Mr. Phelps explained the Head Welfare Examiner position entailed significant supervisory duties overseeing the Medicaid program, which encompassed a majority of their budget (73%). Furthermore, he apprised, the four Medicaid positions were 100% reimbursable.

Mr. Phelps stated he recalled discussions during budget time about the necessity of a Deputy Commissioner position, which lead him to review this position in other counties of similar population. While most districts throughout New York State (NYS) had three Directors or a Deputy and two Directors, he noted that Warren County had only two Directors. As with all positions, Mr. Phelps said this Deputy Commissioner position should be approached from an investment perspective utilizing the available resources to contain County costs.

Mr. Phelps apprised he began his career with the Department of Social Services (DSS) 32 years ago, commencing with the Assistance Division. He said the County had benefitted from controlling program costs within the Assistance Division by decreasing the Public Assistance expenditures from \$3.1 million to \$1.3 million. With the exception of Medicaid, he indicated they shifted people from County-funded services to 100% federally funded

programs, thereby reducing the local share. As Medicaid expenditures increased due to a growth in enrollment in Family Health Plus, he stated, his Department attempted a cost containment strategy to reduce their projected costs. As they reduced their Public Assistance caseloads, Mr. Phelps said they shifted their staff to support the growth of caseloads in other areas. In summation, he said, many strategies had been accomplished that saved the County funds.

While progress had been made to control the Foster Care expenditures, Mr. Phelps reported an increase in Child Protective Services (CPS) reports and investigations. He said it was his belief the cost for residential placement was exorbitant (\$329/day); therefore, he proposed focusing their attention on the Services Division to reduce the number of children in care, the duration of their care and the type of placement. Mr. Phelps apprised he would need a Deputy Commissioner with this knowledge and background to assist him.

In response to an inquiry by Mr. Kenny, Mr. Phelps replied all four vacant positions included fringe benefits and were 100% federally reimbursed.

Mr. Phelps said he recommended promoting the Director of Social Services to the Deputy Commissioner position; promoting the Grade B Supervisor to Director of Social Services; but not backfill the Grade B position with the understanding that the Director and Deputy Commissioner would assume those duties jointly to assist in developing strategies to contain the costs in the Services area. He indicated the current salary for the Director of Social Services would increase \$7,684, from \$57,516 to \$65,200, and to promote the Grade B Supervisor (\$41,848) to Director of Social Services (\$52,316) would be an increase of \$10,468, for a total cost to fill the position of Deputy Commissioner of \$18,152.

Mr. Phelps stated the County now had the opportunity to fill the Deputy Commissioner position and target the Services Division at the same time. He distributed copies of a resume from a potential candidate for the position of Deputy Commissioner of Social Services, a copy of which is on file with the minutes.

Mr. Kenny requested an Executive Session in order to discuss the employment history of a specific individual.

Motion was made by Mr. Kenny, seconded by Mr. Sheehan and carried unanimously, that Executive Session be declared pursuant to Section 105(f) of the Public Officers Law.

Executive Session was declared from 12:28 p.m. to 12:52 p.m.

Committee reconvened and Mr. Tessier announced that no action was taken as a result of the Executive Session.

Mr. Phelps stated he would like to fill the following positions: Head Welfare Examiner, Principal Social Welfare Examiner, Senior Social Welfare Examiner and Social Welfare Examiner as the funds were already within the Department of Social Services (DSS)

budget. He said a couple positions were provisional appointments pending Civil Service examination. Mr. Kenny stated if Mr. Phelps had a particular individual he would recommend for the Deputy Commissioner of Social Services position, he would welcome the opportunity to meet and discuss the expectations of this position with that person.

Motion was made by Mr. Bentley, seconded by Mr. Kenny and carried unanimously approving the requests to fill the vacant positions as outlined above, and refer same to the Personnel Committee. Copies of the resolution request forms are on file with the minutes.

In a brief conference with Richard Kelly, Personnel Officer, and Todd Lunt, Human Resources Director, Joan Parsons, Commissioner of Administrative & Fiscal Services, noted the job description that Mr. Phelps distributed was acquired from another County, as there was no current job duty statement for the position of Deputy Commissioner of Social Services in Warren County. Mr. Phelps responded the job description he distributed was predicated upon New York State (NYS) regulations. In previous Committee meetings, Mrs. Parsons said there were discussions the Deputy Commissioner would be required to have basic human resource responsibilities to assist Mr. Phelps in his day-to-day duties, and that was not reflected in the job description distributed by Mr. Phelps. According to the job description of the Deputy Commissioner of Social Services adopted by the Warren County Personnel Department on December 28, 2006, Mr. Kenny stated this particular individual would supervise the work of all subordinate professional, technical and clerical staff. Mr. Phelps added this job description was prescribed in Book 18 of the regulations 679.10 (3).

After a brief discussion, Mr. Tessier apprised the general consensus of the Committee was to refer the matter relating to the position of Deputy Commissioner of Social Services to the Personnel Committee.

**Note: Subsequent to the meeting, it was determined that the Social Services Committee would discuss the issue further prior to referring it to the Personnel Committee.**

Mr. Phelps added a newly hired employee would be attending a one-week training seminar in Albany, commencing February 26, 2007 and returning on March 2, 2007. He apprised the New York State reimbursement rate for travel was 21 cents per mile; therefore, he said, it would appear more feasible for the County to subsidize the 21 cents per mile to/from Albany and allow her to utilize her own personal vehicle. By granting her permission to utilize her vehicle, Mr. Dusek stated it would relieve the County of any liability and it was economically cheaper. Mr. Caimano suggested making an exception to the Travel Policy. While he acknowledged these travel requests arose quite frequently, Mr. Phelps asked if he had the support of the Committee to approve such requests. Mr. Dusek suggested amending the current travel policy granting this exception, noting the County would be relieved of all liability when traveling on their own time.

Mrs. Parsons stated the current Travel Policy did not permit these types of requests and suggested making limitations in the Policy. She said, in 2006 Warren County paid \$83,000 to DSS employees who did not utilize County vehicles. Mr. Phelps responded there were

insufficient fleet vehicles to support the field work of DSS employees. He stated Public Health had 48 vehicles to assist with their field work while his Department only had five. Furthermore, he stated, it seemed unfair for his employees to come from the DSS building to check out a fleet vehicle, which utilized approximately 20 minutes of their time. Mrs. Parsons commented that as long as the Travel Policy included the use of personal vehicles, she did not foresee a problem. Mr. Dusek suggested scheduling a meeting to resolve the various issues and then report back to the Committee. Mr. Phelps added there were numerous facets that needed to be taken into consideration.

Motion was made by Mr. Bentley, seconded by Mr. Kenny and carried unanimously approving the request to amend the Warren County Travel Policy to include authorizing County employees permission to utilize their personal vehicles when attending County business that required overnight stay; and the necessary resolution was authorized for the March 16, 2007 Board Meeting.

There being no further business to come before the Committee, on motion by Mr. Kenny and seconded by Mr. Bentley, Mr. Tessier adjourned the meeting at 1:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra L. Schreiber, Legislative Office Specialist