



Committee on Social Services

~MINUTES~

Tuesday, February 26, 2019

10:00 AM

DRAFT

Committee Chair: Kitley Covill

Committee Room, 148 Martine Avenue, 8th Floor, White Plains, NY 10601

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CALL TO ORDER

With a quorum present, Chair Kitley Covill called the meeting to order at 10:12 AM.

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Kitley Covill	Chair	Present	
Nancy Barr	D6 Legislator	Present	
MaryJane Shimsky	D12 Legislator (Majority Whip)	Present	
David J. Tubiolo	D14 Legislator	Remote	
Alfreda Williams	D8 Legislator (Vice Chair)	Absent	

Kevin McGuire - Commissioner of Social Services, John Befus, DSS, Dr. DaMia Harris-Madden - Executive Director of the Youth Bureau David Ryan - Chief of Police Pound Ridge, Alison Boak - Founder of IOFA (International Organization for Adolescents) Robi Schlaff - Office for Women, Natalie Chara My Sister's Place

MINUTES APPROVAL

1. Tuesday, January 22, 2019 at 11:00 AM

On motion of Legislator Shimsky, seconded by Legislator Barr the minutes were approved 3 -0.

2. Wednesday, January 23, 2019 at 1:04 PM

On motion of Legislator Shimsky, seconded by Legislator Barr the minutes were approved 3 -0.

I. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Discussion on Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence

Chair Covill opened the meeting and invited the guests to the table. Alie Boak began the discussion with a brief overview of how the Anti-Human Trafficking Taskforce began. It started in 2009 with Chief of Police, Dave Ryan in the Town of Pound Ridge, there was a case of labor trafficking that was found to include sexual exploitation, the case was very complex and the trafficker will receive life in prison. The task-force was started after a meeting with the Chief Ryan, Alie Boak and My Sister's Place was the organization providing Social Services to the victims, and the question was asked about what they will do because they do not want Human Trafficking in Westchester County. The goal of the task force is to

conduct proactive investigations of Human Trafficking crimes within Westchester, coordinate those investigations with Local State and Federal law enforcement and service providers. Identify victims of all types of trafficking.

Natalie Chara, Director of the Human Trafficking Program at My Sister's Place

Chair Covill asked if there are estimates for Westchester County?

Ms. Boak responded that there are no estimates anywhere. Data collection is one of the biggest problems because it's a hidden and underground crimes. And every state has a different definition of what trafficking is and it makes it difficult to define and track. What the task-force does and sees is how their outreach and training efforts increase which enables them to see how the numbers are increasing in Westchester County. As of 2018 WC has identified the second most number of trafficking victims outside of NYC. It may be because the great efforts of Social Services because they have a policy that any child that comes into their system gets screened for trafficking.

Chief Ryan spoke to the challenges of Law enforcement. He makes an effort to train the new recruits about Human Trafficking. There needs to be more training because it's out there, there have been 6 cases in Pound Ridge alone. Although it's a challenge there are complex cases which require a lot of man hours. There can be 11, 12, 13 interviews with the victims just to get a little bit of information. There's foreign trafficking and domestic trafficking. There is no single source of database on trafficking but it does not exist which is a major challenge.

Chair Covill then asked the Department of Social Services (DSS) to address the committee and share whatever information they can that is not confidential.

John Befus, Deputy Commissioner of DSS, the work DSS did with Safe Harbor which is a state legislator to treat trafficked youth as victims and not offenders. In 2012 DSS began as a member of the task-force and started a program to train to develop a plan to identify victims of human trafficking. After Safe Harbor began it was discovered that it is much more difficult to reach the victims.

Chair Covill asked if DSS has contracts with providers.

Mr. Befus responded yes, there biggest partner is Children's Village, the program was very specific, in addition to training up the case management team and worked with them on a model that involves a lot of psycho educational work, alternative therapy, art and cooking therapy etc. they tie into their motivational work.

Chair Covill asked if there victims are housed at Children's Village.

Mr. Befus responded that the cases are put in preventative cases but there are also times when they are housed at Children's.

My Sister's Place is the only agency that has a Federal grant and they keep the numbers of cases and the statistics.

Commissioner Kevin McGuire, addressed the Committee. One of his biggest question to missing children aside from the individuals who return home for a weekend and decide not to come back, those individuals were easy to track because they could simply call the families and arrange to pick them up. There was another core set of individuals who were outright missing for a significant amount of time raised a big question. From his own experience he expected that something bad had gone on and they were just missing that they were involved in something and in way over their heads. A private investigator was hired and within the first weekend he recovered a couple of teenagers. It was discovered through working with DSS and local police that the teenagers were being trafficked. But it takes a lot of man power to investigate these cases. The first investigator recovered about 150 children since 2013. The second investigator was hired because the caseload grew and he has been working with DSs for about 2 years and has recovered approximately 25 kids.

Natalie Chara, My Sister's Place addressed the committee and explained that they provide case management services for adults who have been victims of trafficking and they work with individuals who have been labor trafficked. But there is a huge issue with adult trafficking particularly labor trafficking, domestic servitude like nannies or au pair. Many of those victims come to MSP through word of mouth from a friend who received services.

Chair Covill asked for clarification of case management

Ms. Chara responded that they work intensely with the client and what their needs are, food shortages, child rearing, college applications etc. what the individual needs are vary. MSP gets their funding from Office of Women and a Federal grant from the Office of Victims of Crimes and OTDA and TIVA

Chair Covill asked how many victims does MSP serves in a year?

Ms. Chara, right now there are 60-70 active cases.

Robin Schlaff, Office of Women has done training to identify trafficking to identify trafficking victims. Two issues that need to be explored more are the criminal justice response in the judicial system there were no cases and no collaboration and they wanted to have a trafficking court. And the other is the resources available to victims after they leave the sex trade. The basic resources such as food, housing, education, the things they need to live and survive.

Chair Covill invited the US Attorney's Office, Kate Martin; deputy Chief in White Plains addressed the committee and stated in Federal criminal cases there is more sex trafficking than labor trafficking. The U.S. Attorney's Offices works closely with MSP, this relationship has been very beneficial because it is often very difficult to get the victims to have to testify all over again and MSP is extremely helpful is supporting the victims through the entire prosecuting process. And then support systems they offer helps the victim.

Dr. DaMia Harris-Madden, Executive Director of the Youth Bureau explained that last year all Youth Bureau Directors were trained on Little Red, through the Office of Children Family Services which a very short video aimed at young children and it speaks to the dangers of sex trafficking. Much of the work on youth bureaus is to encourage teens to engage in safe relationships and provide them with the tools to identify sex trafficking so they can avoid getting into situations where they can be sex trafficked.

Chair Covill acknowledged all of the information that was provided by all of the guests and asked what more can be done.

Chief Ryan answered and stated that every Legislators represents a District, they can encourage their Local Police Departments to direct someone to attend the Human Trafficking Task-Force meeting. They meet once every 3 months with the next meeting taking place on Friday, March 1st.

Mr. Befus mentioned that DSS proposed to expand the Safe Harbor Unit with the implementation of Raise the Age.

II. OTHER BUSINESS

Unfinished Business and any other agenda items to come before the Committee.

III. RECEIVE & FILE

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Legislator Shimsky seconded by Legislator Barr the Committee adjourned at 11:24 AM.