



# Onondaga County Legislature

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## **HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE MINUTES – MARCH 23, 2021 JULIE ABBOTT-KENAN, CHAIR**

**MEMBERS PRESENT: Dr. Chase, Ms. Cody, Mr. Bush, Mr. Kinne**

**ALSO ATTENDING: Chairman Knapp, Ms. Kuhn, Mrs. Ervin, Mr. Frateschi, Ms. Rooney, Dr. Gupta, Ms. McCauley, Ms. Alford, Ms. Spoto Decker, Ms. Mignano, Mr. Smorol, Mr. Pratt, Ms. Mahar, Ms. Hudson, Mr. Gasiorowski, Ms. Kaminski, K. Hum, Mr. Frantzis, Ms. McNamara, Ms. Lesniak, Ms. Vilardi, Mr. DeSantis**

Chair Abbott-Kenan called the meeting to order at 12:02 p.m. *A motion was made by Mr. Bush, seconded by Dr. Chase to waive the reading of the minutes. A motion was made by Dr. Chase, seconded by Ms. Cody to approve the minutes of the previous committee meeting. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.*

**1. ADULT & LONGTERM CARE SERVICES:** Ms. Lisa Alford, Commissioner and JoAnne Spoto Decker, Deputy Commissioner Aging

**a. INFORMATIONAL: Seniors in the Community**

Ms. Alford:

- Provide a general overview of COVID response from the past year's work – especially regarding seniors in our community
- Pleased to offer a general update on our past year's work with Onondaga County seniors. Joining me today is Deputy Commissioner and Executive Director for the Office for Aging, JoAnne Spoto Decker.

Ms. Spoto Decker:

- Our Senior Nutrition Program managed the COVID-19 pandemic Senior Nutrition and Healthcare Worker Hotline follow-up, responding to over 3,000 calls. Senior Nutrition hotline callers were screened for nutritional needs, including nutrition counseling and case management, and then referred to other programs and services provided through Office for Aging, NY Connects and other department units, as appropriate, to meet additional needs related to the Covid-19 shelter-in-place guidelines.
- Over 350,000 take-out and home delivered meals were provided to seniors and healthcare workers. Office for Aging led this coordinated effort with multiple community providers as well as County interdepartmental staff.
- Office for Aging and New York Connects facilitated the delivery of masks and pallets of hand sanitizer from New York State Office for the Aging, resulting in the distribution of more than 35,000 masks and cases of hand sanitizer to assisted living facilities, nutrition providers, senior housing buildings, senior centers, community-based agencies, and transportation programs, totaling more than 65 programs and organizations.
- Each year the Office for Aging plans for programs and services that will meet the needs of Onondaga County seniors and their caregivers for the coming year. We hold in-person Public Hearings to receive valuable feedback on what is working well and what may need to be reimaged or created in order to meet the diversity of need. This past year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were unable to hold these important in-person forums. As a result, in November 2020, we surveyed Onondaga County seniors and senior service providers to offer input on the issues, programs, and services that are most important to them, their caregivers, and families.
- 238 seniors participated in the Senior Survey. We asked them "What concerns you the most?" Seniors were encouraged to select all that applied. Not surprising - 62% said the Pandemic. 61% Health & Fitness, 32% Health Care Costs and 31% Home Repairs. 30% were concerned about being Alone and Isolated. 29% with Depression/Anxiety, 28% Living Independently and 20% Grocery Shopping. Other concerns were cited as well.

- Seniors were asked “What Office for Aging Services have you used?” 69% have used our Nutrition Services. We have dozens of senior dining sites throughout Onondaga County providing nutritious meals for anyone 60 or older (and their spouse of any age.) During the pandemic we had no choice but to close these sites but we immediately pivoted and as the summer progressed we were able to arrange pick-up meals at some senior housing and senior centers. We were able to distribute the Farmers Market Nutrition Coupons during the Pandemic, using COVID-19 safety protocols. Lastly, home delivered meals continued to be provided to those who are incapacitated and unable to shop, cook or prepare their own meals daily. The need for this service increased over the past year. Meal delivery is also a critical safety check for those seniors who are isolated.
- Our Nutrition Services unit also manages our Health Promotion/Evidence Based Programming in keeping with our goal of creating a healthy aging process. Courses offered, currently via a zoom platform, are: Chronic Disease Self-Management Program, Tai Chi for Arthritis and Diabetes Self-Management Program.
- 59% of senior respondents have used one or more of our Community Service Programs. Our Community Service Programs for seniors includes many diverse resources for older adults, including referrals for home repairs, housing counseling, legal services, shopping services, senior center activities, and social work services. We make transportation referrals and assist with escorted medical transportation for those with no other assistance. Our Neighborhood Advisor program provides services to older adults to assist them in maintaining their independence. They also help people with applying for income-stretching programs. Most of these programs were still operational during the Pandemic but we adjusted them to meet COVID-19 guidelines. There was a huge increase in requests for our Shopper’s Service during this time. The numbers have continued to stay high as many seniors are homebound and have no one who is able to shop for them and they can’t afford the other more expensive shopping services.
- Health Insurance Information Counseling Assistance Program (“HIICAP”) provides free and unbiased health insurance information and assistance. The Medicare enrollment period opened October 15<sup>th</sup> and went until December 7<sup>th</sup>. Volunteer counselors assist with explaining medical bills; provide information on Medicare, supplemental health insurance and prescription drug coverage. Calls increased this year due to the isolation factor, the many television ads and the uncertainty that many have during the pandemic.
- 50% of seniors surveyed said they have contacted us for Information and Assistance. Our number (315) 435-2362 is staffed from 8:30 to 4:30. Our staff will inform you on what is available and explain the eligibility requirements and they will also give you information and contact numbers for other community resources when applicable.
- 26% responded that they have reached out to the Office for Aging for - Home Energy Assistance Program (“HEAP”) assistance. HEAP helps individuals meet energy expenses with a one-time payment to their utility company or fuel vendor. Our office helps county residents, age 60 plus, access the HEAP benefit. We also assist seniors with linkages to other income-stretching programs including SNAP and the Medicare Savings Program. During the Pandemic we continued to go to seniors homes to pick-up the necessary paperwork to avert their heating emergency. There has been an increase in new senior HEAP applications this year.
- 18% of surveyed seniors have received assistance from our Caregiver Services unit. We offer information and consultation to family caregivers. In our Caregiver Discussion Group meetings, caregivers share their experiences and find peer support. The Institute for Caregivers offers public education by local experts, on a wide variety of topics useful to family caregivers. Currently these presentations are offered in a live zoom platform and are available for future viewing on our website.
- 8% of seniors who responded to the survey have used the Expanded In-Home Services for the Elderly or EISEP program. EISEP helps older adults, and their families delay or avoid placement in nursing facilities by combining case management and non-medical supportive services for frail seniors who are age 60 or older. Many of those already receiving EISEP services asked that the home health care aide to not come during the height of the pandemic.
- The wide range of services and providers for long term care can be overwhelming. New York Connects offers free, impartial information and assistance to help Onondaga County residents and their families in determining what services or programs are available to them and which ones meet their needs most appropriately. We work with any age and any payer source.
- We asked surveyed seniors, “Have you experienced feeling down, depressed, or anxious in the past six months?” 59% said several days, 23% not at all, 18% every day and 10% more than ½ of the days. It is important to note that this period corresponds to a time of severe isolation due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. We have a critical program to assist in these unprecedented times. The Office for Aging offers the Senior Health and Resource Partnership Project (“SHARP”) or the Project that serves seniors age 55 and older with addiction,

depression, or other Mental Health Issues. It provides care management, aging, mental health, and substance use counseling. During the height of the Pandemic we had the highest number of SHARP referrals in New York State.

- Our November survey had 110 local Senior Providers give us input. Their answers showed that our Office is a critical referral resource for them. 82% of responding service providers stated they contacted the Office for Aging for information and assistance on our programs and services.
- At the last quarter of 2019, The Office for Aging received an \$80,000 planning Age-Friendly Planning Grant from New York State Office for Aging. We and the Onondaga County Health Department serve as the lead conveners of critical stakeholders from government and community organizations. The goal is to address issues, problems and opportunities at the local level that will promote policies and programs which replicate and align the Health Across All Policies/Age Friendly New York initiative. The grant will fund the newly formed Livable Communities Alliance of Onondaga County which will address and incorporate Smart Growth Principles, as well as the eight (8) Domains of age-friendly-livable communities by building upon the existing economic and environmental infrastructure, as well social programming already in place.
- New York is the first state to achieve an “Age-Friendly” designation. The Livable Communities Alliance of Onondaga County will solidly support that designation by promoting health and social equity of all residents and ensure systems align to make age-friendly Onondaga County: A Great Place to be Young and Grow Old. The Alliance, which includes more than 20 member organizations, convened at the height of the pandemic.

Ms. Alford:

- JoAnne and I are extremely proud of our staff members; many have worked, when needed, at testing sites, vaccination hubs, and as contract tracers. Many worked remotely and intensely for almost a year. Our staff came back to the Civic Center on March 15 and is continuing to offer the same level of service that our Department is known for. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to share our year with you today.

Mrs. Abbott-Kenan:

- Thanks for all the noble and awesome work you do - how many participate in SHARP project?

Ms. Spoto Decker:

- Program started in 2017 with a lot of advertising and promotion – since then more word of mouth – partner with Helio and Liberty Resources
- 228 participating in SHARP program – well exceeded what was anticipated
- Thanks to Legislators Kinne, Bush and Ervin for service to the Advisory board
- Answered Ms. Kuhn’s question – SHARP project is a service for mental health and drug addiction

Mr. Kinne:

- Thanks to JoAnne for all her help – he’s POA for 85 year old deaf lady
- Shocked that 2021 we still have the system that we have - how hard it is to help someone that is in need of help – little money and born deaf – wish there was a better system

Mrs. Ervin:

- Throughout pandemic and isolation has elder abuse increased and have you staffed accordingly?
- Let us know if you have not received the proper resources

Ms. Alford:

- Seeing numbers increase of those needing guardianship – unable to get other support – challenge is balancing cases that require more services

Ms. Cody:

- Appreciate all that has and is being done by your group - how did you train caregivers?

Ms. Alford:

- Virtual training has been helpful because busy but they are able to watch from home

Ms. Spoto Decker:

- Trainers have access to platforms – access to Zoom is high – 60-75 year olds have Zoom access – realize it's not the end all but certainly has been a good option

**2. HEALTH DEPARTMENT:** Dr. Gupta, Health Department Commissioner and Dan Wears, EMS Commissioner  
**a. INFORMATIONAL: Schools & COVID Measures**

Dr. Gupta:

- Thanks to all – a lot of work being done by a lot of other departments
- Second day of drive thru clinic – almost 1,000 day 1, 1,400 day 2 – very smooth operation
- Sheriff, traffic, temporary workers, pharmacists, EMS, Parks – every department is participating
- If weather allows drive thrus will continue – last appointment at 4:20pm and finished by 4:30pm
- Pop up at Atonement Lutheran Church starts today at 1pm – small and large pop ups – serving a purpose to reenergize folks – eager to sign up people within their community
- CE is a fierce champion to get people vaccinated
- 136,210 Onondaga County residents have first dosage
- Main concern is vaccine hesitancy and opening to all – hoping Governor will open to all ages
- Most new cases are younger people infecting each other

Ms. Abbott-Kenan:

- Thoughts on 3' rule for schools – now also from CDC - expense to barriers – status of getting kids back to school

Dr. Gupta:

- Onondaga County first to get barriers – gathering information to see if evidence supports action
- Can't require schools to adhere – only recommend
- What happens today impacts kids long term
- Friday recommended removing barriers – State is looking into it – County will update website and talk to Superintendents
- Mask on, hand washing, transportation, distance remains at 6' – have to evaluate data within their own school
- Provided schools with a tool kit – any changes in transmission will impact guidance
- Director retired in October - intense nationwide search for replacement – few applicants – interviewed a few qualified candidates – top candidate has masters and MBA – unique because provides fiscal knowledge – working in field for 11 years – quality control assurance which is key for law enforcement and defendant – many other qualifications including hands on – serves as mentor for the American Society Crime Lab – candidate is familiar with new document management system
- Lab is accredited – 35 support staff – mostly scientists – to attract a qualified candidate we have to incentivize – \$139,937 for grade 39 – looking to have this approved so could move forward with offering the candidate the position

Mr. Kinne:

- Thought we were going to team up with Upstate to qualify

K. Hum, Interim Lab Director and Permanent Quality Assurance Director:

- Typically take interns from SU Forensic Masters and Undergrad program
- Some interns from Upstate – large group requesting internships with few openings

**3. CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES:** Damian Pratt, Director  
**a. INFORMATIONAL: Hillbrook**

Mr. Pratt:

- Brief overview of status of Capital project and next steps - 32 beds made up of eight units each with four bed units
- Orientation unit is for receiving new clients into facility – allows for increase safety protocol – clients spend initial week in this unit – usually within first week may seek bail and not assimilate into rest of facility
- Medical services near entrance - every new client has a physical — new clinical office for mental services staff

- Security upgrades are required by NYS – most didn't apply to us prior to raise the age – have a system for room observation, upgrades in new door hardware
- Should be completed within the next two weeks – next step will be to ask to fill positions for new facility
- Requesting total of 17 positions – positions will be funded by other sources – reimbursed 100% for all that are outside of Onondaga County – Raise the Age (“RTA”) are reimbursed for all 16 and older
- 31 residents today – 24 100% reimbursed – 7 are reimbursed at 49% - believe 80% of population will be reimbursed 100%

Ms. Rooney:

- Asking to create new titles - not included in budget because unsure of COVID impact on capital project – been able to keep on schedule which results in a mid-year request
- No indication that there will be any change in reimbursement – one of six facilities in the State – currently 49% is minimum reimbursement

Dr. Chase:

- Would reimbursement cover staffing?
- How long will State reimbursement go on? Understood reimbursement was to get Hillbrook up and going
- How many of 31 total residents are older than 16 – Mr. Pratt answered that 22 are older than 16

Mr. Pratt:

- All costs of building are submitted and divided based on population – don't physically take payment from other Counties – all payments come from quarterly submittals – reimbursed based on number of care days
- Certain positions are 100% reimbursed – required to have rapid response team – new law required so all those positions are 100% reimbursed – all 17 positions requests will be 100% reimbursed
- Centrally located - request for expansion was approved when other locations was denied
- Seeing younger people with us for longer periods of time – some have been with us for over a year
- Exciting things happening with youth in education – first resident received a Regents diploma last week

Mr. Kinne:

- Confirm received 100% from out of County clients – how is reimbursement accounted for?
- Request a snap shot of an example month to see what it actually costs the taxpayer

Mr. Pratt:

- Segregate the RTA and claim 100% - then take remaining expenses and compute how much per day

***A motion was made by Ms. Cody, seconded by Dr. Chase, to adjourn the meeting. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.***

The meeting was adjourned at 1:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



MELANIE VILARDI, Deputy Clerk  
Onondaga County Legislature