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4 **EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE**
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6 **OF THE**
7
8 **SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE**
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10 **MINUTES**
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15 A meeting of the Education & Labor Committee of the Suffolk County
16 Legislature was held in the Maxine S. Postal Auditorium of the
17 Evans K. Griffing Building, 300 Center Drive, Riverhead, New York
18 on March 1, 2023.
19
20
21

22 **MEMBERS PRESENT:**

23 Leg. James F. Mazzarella, Chairperson
24 Leg. Stephanie Bontempi, Vice Chair
25 Leg. Samuel Gonzalez (excused absence)
26 Leg. Trish Bergin
27 Leg. Kara Hahn
28 Leg. Jason Richberg
29 Leg. Leslie Kennedy
30

31 **ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

32 Presiding Officer Kevin McCaffrey, 14th Legislative District
33 William Duffy, Counsel to the Legislature
34 Frank Tassone, Clerk of the Legislature
35 Hope Clark, Acting Clerk/Legislature
36 Benny Pernice, Budget Review Office
37 Elizabeth Stroehlein, Budget Review Office
38 Ben Zwirn, Suffolk Community College
39 Rosalie Drago, Commissioner/Department of Labor, Licensing &
40 Consumer Affairs
41 Evelyn Ortiz, Deputy Commissioner, DOL
42 Joe McNearney, Deputy Commissioner, DOL
43 Selman Kurtoglu, DOL
44 Adam Moser, DOL
45 Christina DeLisi, DOL
46 Tim Rothang, Aide to Leg. Mazzarella
47 Chris DeLuca, Aide to PO
48 And all other interested parties
49

50 **MINUTES TAKEN BY:**

51 Diana Flesher, Court Stenographer
52
53
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56

THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 11:38 AM

1
2
3 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**

4 Good morning. Welcome to the February 15th -- oh, it's not
5 February 15th (laughter). That's what my paperwork says.
6 February's gone. Welcome to the March 1st Education & Labor
7 Committee meeting. We will begin by saying the pledge led by
8 Legislator Bontempi.

9
10 **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

11
12 If you could just remain standing for a moment of silence for the
13 victims of the recent earthquake in Turkey and Syria.

14
15 **MOMENT OF SILENCE OBSERVED**

16
17 Thank you. Good morning, Mr. Clerk.

18
19 **CLERK TASSONE:**

20 Good morning, Mr. Chairman.

21
22 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**

23 Roll call, please.

24
25 (Roll call by Frank Tassone, Clerk of the Legislature)

26
27 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**

28 Present.

29
30 **LEG. BONTEMPI:**

31 Present.

32
33 **LEG. HAHN:**

34 (No response)

35
36 **LEG. GONZALEZ:**

37 (No response)

38
39 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**

40 Excused.

41
42 (Continued roll call)

43
44 **LEG. BERGIN:**

45 Present.

46
47 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

48 Here.

49
50 **LEG. RICHBERG:**

51 (No response).

52
53 **P.O. McCARTHY:**

54 Here.

1 **LEG. HAHN:**
2 (No response)

3
4 **LEG. RICHBERG:**
5 (No response)

6
7 **CLERK TASSONE:**
8 Five.

9
10 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**
11 Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Is there any correspondence?

12
13 **CLERK TASSONE:**
14 All correspondence has been distributed accordingly, Mr. Chairman.

15
16 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**
17 Thank you. Do we have anyone speaking under public portion?

18
19 **MR. DeLUCA:**
11:40AM 20 There are no speakers, Mr. Chairman.

21
22 **PRESENTATION**

23
24 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**
25 Thank you. So, we'll proceed then to presentations today. We have
26 Commissioner Rosalie Drago from Department of Labor, Licensing &
27 Consumer Affairs. She'll give us an update on her department's
28 activities in this past year and maybe some of their future
29 initiatives going forward. Commissioner, thank you for being here.

11:40AM 30
31 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**
32 Can you hear me? Okay. And can you see the screen? Okay, I wanna
33 make sure the screen comes up for you. We made copies for everyone
34 here today; physical copies you can take with you and we'll e-mail
35 them back to your office as well.

36
37 Thank you for the opportunity to present. As you know, because you
38 live it everyday, public service is a labor of love. It also has
39 emphasis on the labor part. And so when we get to talk about the
11:41AM 40 things that we've accomplished and our vision for the future, it's
41 a good incentive and inspiring. I want to thank you for your
42 partnership over the past year. I also want to thank the BRO
43 because they recently came in and we gave them an overview of the
44 department and a lot of their really good questions helped shaped
45 this presentation today. So, I appreciate you. And for my team
46 here today our Deputy Evelyn Ortiz and Joe McNearney are the two
47 deputy commissioners; one over Employment Services; the over in
48 Consumer Affairs and Licensing. And also thanks to our team here
11:41AM 49 today Adam Moser, Christina DeLisi and Selman Kurtoglu who, if you
50 like the presentation, he does all our marketing stuff, so. You
51 good? Okay.

52
53 So we'll go over the department mission again. I'd like to start
54 with that. That's sort of critical for us, a look back at 2022 and
55 the 2023 operating conditions and goals. To review, what guides us
56 everyday economically empowering work for all Suffolk County

1 residents ready, able, diverse local talent for businesses and
2 unions equitable growth, mutual -- what that means for us is mutual
3 success so that businesses and workers and communities and unions
4 all thrive simultaneously. We're not making decisions that benefit
5 one that hurt the other. And collaboration and partnership to make
6 sure that the people we serve are helping to influence and design
7 the programs because that's really what we -- that's really who
8 we're serving. So what we do, we need to get their feedback on a
9 regular basis and incorporate that.

10
11 I added to this because I know many of you have seen the mission
12 statement. We recently had an all-staff meeting and talked about
13 what we value inside the department that helps us: Accuracy and
14 promptness. So the exchange of accurate and timely information
15 between each other and our stakeholders. We know that things like
16 the cyber incident, other things have delayed that accurate --
17 well, not accurate but the timeliness and hopefully we're back on
18 that line with that. Integrity, accountability and consistently.
19 We have a strong worth ethic in our team and we're holding our team
11:43AM 20 accountable and each other accountable for excellence. Engagement
21 as a team. One of the things we focussed on in 2022 that doesn't
22 have a number to it, but is an actual daily effort is that everyone
23 is working together and sharing information internally in our
24 department. And you'll see how that has impacted our work. We've
25 encouraged curiosity. And what I mean by that I got here an hour
26 earlier and sat in our Riverhead office helping Public Assistance
27 clients myself, sitting there and asking what is happening; why is
28 it happening, right; how can we help; what's the root cause of the
29 problem and excellent customer service. So we're working towards
11:43AM 30 all those things.

31
32 2022: 816 residents were trained for industry positions. That is
33 free training, paid training at our current institutions, BOCES,
34 Suffolk Community College, Stony Brook. So union programs, we
35 provide paid training. A thousand youth age 14 to 21 engage in
36 paid work experience. Our goal is to make sure that the site works
37 simultaneously helping people today and building a talent pipeline
38 for tomorrow; so making sure that you have access to work and
39 aren't just going to work. Look, I worked in pizza and, you know,
11:44AM 40 in every job, waiting tables. But if we can get them work
41 experience in jobs that have a career ladder, then they're going to
42 go to the right school program or get on a career track with paid
43 work experience and a higher wage.

44
45 We have our employment services at seven community-based
46 organizations in Suffolk County. So we don't just have Patchogue
47 or Riverhead, but we co-locate with community-based organizations
48 because we know that it's difficult to get to places. And if
49 you're struggling, we don't want to make it harder. So we're
11:44AM 50 currently at seven sites. And also delivered employment services
51 at 20 public libraries. So, a plea here and Legislator Mazzarella
52 just said this, if you got a library that we don't partner with,
53 please put us in touch because we can come and do workshops there
54 on site.

55
56 Sixty-two career -- so under our industry hiring support, we've

1 done 62 career exploration events and jobs fares. Career
2 exploration means we are bringing employers into the class room via
3 Zoom where they will do information sessions for multiple schools
4 at once about the careers available. And so we do those
5 exploration events via Zoom now because it's hard to get into --
6 you know, we can get ten school districts on a call at once. But,
7 again, if you have a school in your district that wants to
8 participate and isn't, let us know. And we've helped 500
9 businesses and union recruit for positions this last year.

10
11 Four hundred and eighty individuals received transportation
12 assistance and 400 were fitted for business attire. That's
13 employment support so you can't get to work if you -- you know, you
14 can't get a -- we can get you a job fairly easily. It's can we get
15 you to work? Because a lot of those jobs are during
16 non-traditional hours. So we have partnered with Lift and United
17 Way to provide transportation and we have business attire for
18 folks.

19
20 (Legislator Hahn entered the auditorium)

21
22 And I'm letting you in on a secret that my staff doesn't know
23 because I just worked this out with Island Harvest, but we're going
24 to have a mini food pantry on site in our locations so that we can
25 give healthy snacks to people when they come in should they need it
26 because a lot of our folks come in hungry.

27
28 Two hundred community-based organizations, schools and business
29 associations we partner with. So on a regular basis we host Zooms
11:46AM 30 with community-based organizations to let them know what we're
31 doing and what resources are available. We work with all the
32 schools, both four-year, two-year and most of the non-profits and
33 business associations that you know of. So we listed a few here.
34 And 9,000 residents secured proper pay. So our living wage group
35 goes in, reviews contracts, make sure that workers are getting paid
36 and sometimes they just aren't. So we get restitution for them.
37 And that's a really important part of what we do.

38
39 Job readiness 472 of our SWEP, which is public assistance clients
11:47AM 40 participated in work experience. A lot of people want to work. A
41 lot of people want to work but they're not ready. They need more
42 experience. I was just meeting with a woman in our office who has
43 a medical assistance license but it's 13 years old. And she would
44 like to go and get a little hands-on experience before she goes to
45 get a full-time job. So, we're gonna -- you know, we do workforce
46 placement. If you, I'll beg of you here, I have no shame in
47 begging, if you have companies or non-profits that would be willing
48 to take a worker that will come just to get work experience at no
49 expense to them, we would like -- we need to place -- especially
11:47AM 50 out east. And 75 partnering locations. So currently we have 75
51 work sites that take our public assistance clients to provide free
52 work experience but we certainly could use many, many more.

53
54 Twenty seven thousand six hundred and fifteen clients in total.
55 And, look, that's a number that we have in a computer that we can
56 verify. There are hundreds more that walk in the door that we

1 don't provide in depth service to but we might refer to a food
2 pantry referral and we're working on capturing that. But this is
3 the number of residents that we hope with job search training,
4 resume writing and work experience and job placement.

5
6 Any questions on -- well, let me finish -- look back and then you
7 can ask questions. And, of course, the Brentwood Center, and I say
8 thanks to you (referring) because you helped pass legislation so
9 that we could create the center site secured design; first phase
10 design is in place and we're starting to look at an RFQ for
11 programing partners. But thank you for assisting with this
12 project.

13
14 So before I go onto operating conditions and goals, any questions
15 about what we've done last year? And, again, we'll come to your
16 office and do one-on-one to dive deeper.

17
18 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**
19 Commissioner.

20
21 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**
22 Yes?

23
24 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**
25 You talked about the seven sites. Can you just tell us what they
26 are, the seven sites you operate?

27
28 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**
29 Sure. And I always mess up one of them so that's why I have the
30 team here to be like, hello. We looked at -- just to give you
31 background, the County Executive had started community resource
32 centers, which partner with a non-profit in communities. The
33 decision of where to place them was based on looking at zip code
34 analysis and looking at unemployment rates, poverty rates. So
35 that's how the -- the deciding factor of where they are.

36
37 So it's Brentwood, Wyandanch, BHEP is in Bellport, Huntington
38 Station. And then we rotate co-locating in other places to try it
39 out see and where the traffic is and whether people need it. So,
40 we are -- Bridgehampton and we're looking -- we're here in
41 Riverhead, but this isn't really like clients -- really go to a
42 community-based organization they trust, right. So we do have this
43 Riverhead office here, but we're trying to co-locate with a
44 non-profit in the Riverhead area and we've met with a couple. And
45 so we're looking to expand that. So those are the areas now.

46
47 I'd like to look at something out in Shirley. I'd like to look at
48 some other things, too. So we're doing zip code analysis. But if
49 you, again, say I think there's an area in my jurisdiction that
50 could use someone coming in, and that's where we use the libraries.
51 We don't have enough staff to do five days a week in 20 locations.
52 So what we will do is rotate at libraries. And so, you know,
53 that's our alternative other than, you know, situating ourselves
54 five days a week in a non-profit.

1 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**

2 The recovery and pay, do you see that trend increasing where folks
3 are not being paid and you have to assist them and going after
4 their employers; is that a trend that you're seeing increasing?

5
6 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

7 I don't have the numbers on year-over-year. Part of the cyber
8 incident I can't -- we're trying, you know, get back information
9 but I can get that to you. But, you know, those 9,000 residents
10 and securing pay -- and those are ones that are under county
11 contract. We only have jurisdiction over county contract.

12
13 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**

14 Okay.

15
16 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

17 But I will get that information to you.

18
19 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**

20 But your opinion is that's a trend that's increasing?

21
22 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

23 I think it is. And one of the things we need to do is do more
24 education. So we've really focused, and I didn't put it in here,
25 on education. So I think a lot of times, you know, we're working,
26 and that's on a CA side but that every contractor in Suffolk County
27 we do an informational session, if only by Zoom, that goes over the
28 laws. Because sometimes we're waiting until they're in violation
29 to give back to them. So we're looking at more education of
30 employers. And we've done educational sessions. The business
31 services unit has done educational sessions via Zoom for employers
32 on wages, on youth laws, on, you know, hiring people with
33 disabilities or veterans. So if you are seeing something that
34 you're concerned about, we can certainly do information sessions
35 about those as well. I think it's a challenge we'll always have.
36 It's about keeping on people about education and the cost of
37 choosing the wrong path.

38
39 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**

40 Thank you.

41
42 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

43 So I wanted to take a minute to talk about what's worked. So I was
44 reminiscing about -- I was sworn in here on March 3rd, three years
45 ago. So this is a -- it's coming up on three years. And so we've
46 piloted a bunch of things even in the midst of COVID and we can
47 tell you what works. Every time we foster collaboration between
48 industry, government, community-based organizations and education,
49 the job seeker wins. And so we'll talk a little bit in a minute
50 about the things that we've done in that area.

51
52 And the other thing is earn and learn. We have to pay people to
53 attend training. Most of the people that are coming in our doors
54 cannot leave their \$15 an hour low wage job at Home Depot to train
55 to get to a new job. Because they still have to pay their rent and
56 they still have to support their families. So we've been working

1 on earn and learn program with our federal funds where they're
2 allowed to where we will pay someone \$15 an hour while they're
3 training and provide paid work experience. So a lot of the
4 employers are, like, I'd like to somebody's work already. So we'll
5 pay for six week of their on-the-job work experience. And then
6 they get employed if we provide those things, as well as supporting
7 the non-profits to provide wraparound. So some of the programs
8 I'll talk to you about here, the non-profit provides a coach
9 full-time for each one of the participants. So that ecosystem
10 graphic, the community-based organizations recruit individuals from
11 the community and provide the wraparound support. If they need
12 transport or food or childcare or extra support in coaching, the
13 community-based partner does that because they know the community,
14 they can make a phone call to someone down the road and they do
15 that part of it.

16
17 We incorporate industry to help design the training programs and
18 partners in industry that will agree to take on interns and people
19 that may have barriers, whether that be veterans or people with
20 disabilities or like individuals. And they help design the
21 curriculum and they stay engaged. And then we use our grant
22 funding and expertise to fund and design, you know, bring those
23 teams together to create the programing.

24
25 So the left -- is it your left? Yep. This is a group of
26 individuals that worked with Bridgehampton Center and Soter
27 Technologies, which is a technology and manufacturing company in
28 Suffolk County. And they designed programming and -- yeah,
29 programming, program -- (inaudible) but it's like a design
30 engineering program and coding with the non-profit. The non-profit
31 recruited the individuals. They put them through the training.
32 They did an internship at Soter Technologies. Two of the
33 individuals went onto jobs that are 80,000 and a hundred thousand.
34 And all of these folks have a high school diploma.

35
36 Now, the one individual that we have in here had an aesthetician
37 license. And what we do at Labor is say "we'd like to get you in a
38 higher wage job with a career ladder." So, again, speaking to the
39 woman in the other room, she was like "I could do home healthcare
40 but the wage is low." "But you have a medical assistance license.
41 You got a wage that's higher, you go work for Northwell, they pay
42 for your degree and they move you up and you're a union employee."
43 So we're going to steer toward those higher-wage jobs and training
44 for higher-wage jobs.

45
46 So the other thing about having the industry partner, Derek, who's
47 the CEO called up Dayton T. Brown and said "I'd like you to take
48 one of these individuals on." And they said "we only take people
49 with a Stony Brook degree in engineering." He said "can you try
50 it? I'm a CEO. I'm telling you they're good. I designed this
51 program." So they did it for him. They wouldn't do it for me.
52 I'm a little upset about that. It's all right. But they did it
53 for him because he's a CEO and they trust that he wouldn't make a
54 recommendation about -- a poor business decision.

55
56 Dayton T. Brown hired that individual at a hundred thousand and

1 called back and said "you were right, they didn't need a degree.
2 The program worked." This only works if we do pay them all their
3 attending, have an industry partner. So if you have industry
4 partners that you work with, you know where that level of engaged,
5 send them to us.

6
7 The one on the right-hand side is the Hospitality Program in
8 Hampton Bays. It's an adult program. It's partnered with Canoe
9 Inn, right, the new center, the new high end hospitality group out
10 here. And so same thing. It was run at the high school for
11 adults. It really benefitted the high school students, too.
12 Adults went to the center. There was language translation. There
13 was food every night. There was transportation and there was
14 childcare. The youth at the high school that do childcare program
15 provided childcare for everyone who needed it that was in the
16 training program. Those guys are all working at Canoe Inn or in
17 another hospitality venue out East.

18
19 So I just wanted to share, I know I went on a little long, sorry,
20 but that stuff works. And so we are going to keep advancing that.
21 And the other thing we have to do is apply for grants because our
22 federal grants have restrictions on what we can pay for. And so
23 we're going try to look at private funding or other grant funding.
24 Because, listen, we're helping, you know, a thousand youth this
25 summer. There's five, ten thousand youth that need to be in these
26 programs so we're trying to find expanded funding for that.

27
28 The other thing that works is staff training. We have people
29 who've been at the county for 30 years; trained by people who've
30 been at the county for 30 years. And we are working on making sure
31 their skills are current. Technology changes every five minutes.
32 We're taking them out of the office and bringing them to New York
33 City to see how the city does it; how other counties around the
34 state does it; making sure they're part of associations so they're
35 learning best practices. And we're providing inhouse training on
36 leadership and collaboration. And I gotta say that we can only
37 really serve our customers if we keep investing in our own staff so
38 that their skills are updated as well.

39
40 So for 2023, this is thanks to you guys asking about marketed
41 conditions because I wouldn't have put it in otherwise, we are
42 registering unemployment. But the lovely BRO office asked us does
43 that mean you're going to have less work to do? Absolutely not.
44 We on average will always see about 20,000 people whether the
45 market is up or down. What happens is that the individuals coming
46 in have greater barriers and so they require more hands on, more
47 work and more workforce support. They've likely been out of the --
48 especially since the pandemic -- out of the workforce system
49 longer. And don't let that number fool you of low unemployment. A
50 lot of people -- that's based on who's getting unemployment
51 services. A lot of people just dropped out of the employment
52 market. So that's not a real number anyway. There's plenty of
53 people not even in the system.

54
55 So we get on average 20,000 people a year whether the employment's
56 up or down. But they actually require more work on our part.

1 Today, everyday on average 18 to 20,000 jobs posted on Long Island.
2 The top industries hiring are healthcare, retail, hospitality,
3 education, professional, you know, STEM programs, manufacturing,
4 finance, arts and administrative support. But we only want to
5 focus on the ones with the career ladder and where there's good
6 jobs. So we're steering people towards healthcare. We're steering
7 people towards manufacturing, renewable energy, hospitality. Those
8 are the ones that have high wages. They are also the ones who take
9 manufacturing and healthcare. The majority of their good paying
10 wage jobs and openings are nights and weekends. Those
11 non-traditional hours is when it's hardest to get transportation
12 and childcare. So that's why we are needing to do supports in
13 those areas.

12:00PM

14
15 So when unemployment number goes low, our grants get reduced as
16 well. So that's the other thing. We're usually working with less
17 financial resources which is why you're going to see us going after
18 additional financial resources. We have to expand our services in
19 the community because, as I said, the transportation barriers and
20 others are making it difficult and we have to focus on those earn
21 and learn models. And I think, you know, we're going to need more
22 technology tools to do that. So that's the other sort of
23 investment we have to look at, is that we need more technology. If
24 we're going to go into the community, we need a lap top, we need to
25 be able to make phone calls right from those places so you're gonna
26 see a greater demand for technology there.

12:00PM

27
28 I'll stop for a second on questions and then I can go onto our
29 goals. Yes.

12:01PM

30
31 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

32 Okay, on the paperwork you're going to e-mail us, could you e-mail
33 us a contact person and a phone number for libraries and school
34 districts?

35
36 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

37 Yes.

38
39 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

40 I assume they're two different. And I used to, before COVID,
41 taking people from the Labor Department to train them.

12:01PM

42
43 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

44 You've always been great about that.

45
46 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

47 What?

48
49 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

50 You've always been great, thank you.

51
52 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

53 But not during COVID. (Laughter)

54
55 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

56 Okay.

1
2 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

3 So I'm willing to take whoever needs to.

4
5 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

6 Thank you.

7
8 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

9 You're welcome.

10
11 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

12 Any other questions? So our strategic focus reducing redundancy;
13 increasing accessibility; enhancing services and focusing on
14 programs that remove barriers for the long-term, not the
15 short-term. So reducing redundancy, we combined, you know, we shut
16 down the Oser Office and combined the Public Assistance group SWEP
17 with our WIOA Employment Services. What's that done is everyone's
18 in one place physically but we've also reduced redundancies there
19 so people are cross-trained. The employment -- you know, there are
12:02PM 20 two employment units, through this, everybody's cross-trained,
21 folded in together and working together so that we're not -- we're
22 delivering more service without duplicating efforts. So that's
23 just an example. So, you know, that increased accessibility is the
24 community-based approach. And then I'm gonna go through some of
25 these things.

26
27 So increasing access to our programs. By the way, the staff -- we
28 had a staff retreat. The staff came up with a lot of these
29 strategicals under the direction of the Vision Admissions, so.
12:02PM 30 Increasing access to programs by delivering expanded services in
31 the field; promoting existing programs and web base access to
32 increase employment opportunities.

33
34 (Legislator Richberg entered the auditorium)

35
36 So there are people who are going to want to use the web or need to
37 use the web instead of coming to an office. We don't want, you
38 know, a lot of the laws -- state laws require in person. That was
39 suspended during COVID. We want to keep it that way because we can
12:03PM 40 still provide virtual services for people and just keep doing that.
41 And like I said, the more we can go out into the community, just
42 let us know where to go. We need to expand youth programs to break
43 the cycle of poverty. We're going to keep -- I'd love to never
44 have another adult walk in the door. So if we do expand the youth
45 programs, we can break the cycle of poverty by putting someone
46 younger on the track to a higher wage job. That's critical for us
47 this year.

48
49 Data driven decision making, right, we are putting in place, it is
12:03PM 50 a bare, a technology system so we can track -- we were tracking
51 using the state system but we couldn't access those numbers. So
52 we're putting in place, or expanding, our own technology system for
53 in taking customers and tracking all the interactions and making
54 sure each of our units can speak to each other and we can see --
55 you know, I talk to someone here in Riverhead and I can say "Alice
56 needs a -- here's a resume, she needs a job." And Diane back in

1 Hauppauge can call an employer and she's got an interview tomorrow.
2 So we are deploying technology and it is no easy feat as you know,
3 but that will provide us with dashboards. And you can have real
4 time, you know, once the website's fully functional, you can go on
5 our website and see what does employment look like in your district
6 and what are we doing in the area, too, so you can make better
7 decisions on legislation.

8
9 Training our staff to be informed, industry-informed, this is the
10 important part, industry-informed, customer centered, community
11 engaged and data driven, so. And establishing the Brentwood center
12 with sustainable partnerships between industry, community,
13 education and government so that our residents and businesses
14 succeed. So, remember everything we're doing, we're going to get
15 somebody a job but we're making sure the business has a diverse
16 local, ready-to-work solid pipeline and I will stress local. So,
17 questions? Volunteering helps. Sorry, what?

18
19 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**
20 Legislator Richberg.

21
22 **LEG. RICHBERG:**

23 Thank you, Commissioner, I'm sorry I missed some of the
24 presentation but we had a question yesterday. We had the
25 Commissioner of Social Services here and we were talking about some
26 of the shelters. And we were wondering what support your office --
27 and I'm pretty sure some of my colleagues were here yesterday
28 definitely share this, what support your office can help some of
29 those folks who are in the shelters especially with job placement
30 assistance. I know there's a SWEP Program and some other things.

31
32 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

33 So, thank you for asking. We -- our SWEP clients are shelter
34 clients. There's multiple barriers there and I've spoken before
35 the Commission on this a few times. We provide training, some
36 services to everyone, free training, work experience and paid
37 internships where we can do it. The challenge is, and it's not our
38 County's issue, it's a a state -- you know, there's some state
39 regulations around this, too. But if you're in shelter and you go
40 to work, the money goes to the shelter. So 80 percent of your
41 salary goes to the shelter. And that leaves you with a tiny
42 amount.

43
44 Now, you know, Commissioner Pierre and I work hand-in-hand. Does
45 it make sense that we have to pay the shelter? Because you'd have
46 to pay rent if you were, you know, out in the market, if you will.
47 Yes. However, it could be in escrow. That's done in the city.
48 It's held in escrow and then you feel like you're earning and it's
49 your money and it's in escrow for the future. You have to
50 understand that's what's left over -- so we have a single mom with
51 four children that we just got, you know, working together, got out
52 of shelter and section 8 housing, she's in shelter because of a
53 domestic abuse, nothing that she did. And what's left over after
54 the obligation is barely enough to pay for diapers and food and
55 then there's nothing else. It takes her two buses, an hour and a
56 half to get to our office when she lives ten minutes away. And

1 she's got a benefit's cliff, right, which means she can't earn more
2 than \$2000 or she loses everything. And she can't afford to
3 support four children and pay for childcare for four children when
4 she goes to work.

5
6 It's gonna take me three years and I can get her a job. She could
7 go in the sisters and the brotherhood program at the carpenter's
8 union; or she can go into Opportunities Long Island and in four
9 years she'll be making 85 to a hundred thousand. But between now
10 and then, I have to find a way to get her transportation. And she
11 can't earn over a certain amount. So there's a lot in that, right,
12 and with shelter we try to give first preference and help to the
13 families in shelter so they can stay in shelter in an area where
14 their kids are in school. And that means some of our single folks
15 have to move around. And let's face it, it took us 140 meetings to
16 get her in section 8 housing because there's not enough housing
17 stock and the apartments -- so the stipend for housing for section
18 8 was \$2500. So if you can find me a four-bedroom apartment for
19 \$2500 in Long Island, please let me know.

20
21 So the barriers are not on the employment side. As long as someone
22 is work ready and I mean isn't battling substance abuse or mental
23 health issues, there's a thousand jobs I can get somebody. But
24 these other things, navigating these other things, she was in my
25 office begging for work, right, and we have her on work sites but
26 we had to get her childcare. It took us four months to get her
27 childcare, right. So now she's got childcare but she's only got
28 childcare nine to one. She wants to work, but she can only work up
29 to \$2500 and then I can't -- she can't earn a dollar over. So it's
30 like -- and she's one of thousands.

31
32 So we can get people jobs, but it's everything around the job that
33 is the challenge. And she's, you know, she's in my office crying
34 because she said "I do not" -- she said "I'm embarrassed, I do not
35 want to sit here looking for jobs. I want to work." And so I
36 gotta find her a job that's nine to one so she can get back to get
37 her bus for the children, so. You know, and this requires a deeper
38 conversation that we can have here today and I would have Evelyn
39 and some other folks sit, but we should have a conversation about
40 it.

41
42 And a lot of those rules about how much you can earn so there's a
43 bill Evelyn might want to talk about, income disregard, there's a
44 bill. And at the state level, that would disregard income for six
45 months so that you could still keep your public assistance benefits
46 for six months after you get a job. Why? Because they count a car
47 as an asset and you lose your benefits. Well, I'm sorry, I can't
48 get you to work without a car. So, if you give someone six months,
49 it's enough time to earn a pay check in which you can pay for your
50 own childcare. But it's a lot of moving parts and probably takes
51 -- I really could get into a deeper. I'm sure you don't want to do
52 it now, but we could get into it deeper with you. But employment
53 isn't the problem.

54
55 **LEG. RICHBERG:**
56 Thank you, Commissioner.

1
2 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

3 I miss my friend over there. (Referring to Legislator Trotta) But
4 anytime, we can sit and discuss this in deeper --

5
6 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**

7 Legislator Kennedy, do you have question?
8

9 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

10 If these clients are through DSS, there used to be programs where
11 they could get tokens to take the bus.
12

13 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

14 They can get tokens.
15

16 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

17 Does that still exist? Okay.
18

19 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

20 Absolutely.
21

22 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

23 All right.
24

25 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

26 It's more a function of -- and, listen, everyone in every
27 department is doing their best. If it takes you an hour -- I mean,
28 like, I don't have to tell you this, right, I have kids. I have a
29 10 and a 13-year-old. If it took me an hour-and-a-half to get to
30 work, right, so I have to take -- get up at five -- she gets up at
31 five AM to take a bus to take a kid to childcare and then gets the
32 bus -- walks a mile to the bus from childcare, you know, to get to
33 the office. An employer's going to say *you didn't show up, you*
34 *show up late*, right. The bus -- you miss one bus, the other one's
35 not coming, you know, and that's not our buses' fault. I'm just
36 staying the life of someone without a car in Suffolk County, it's a
37 big deal. And then that's because, like, a car is an asset. And
38 you're not supposed to have any assets when you're on public
39 assistance.
40

41 So, like these things are a little -- so we give bus tokens but if
42 it's an hour-and-a-half to get to work, then an hour-and-a-back and
43 you have kids, you know, to get to a bus, she can only work nine to
44 one and an hour-and-a-half of getting to the office. And she was
45 one of the best workers we've had, right, so, when we had her do
46 groundskeeping. You know who she is.
47

48 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

49 Yeah, I do.
50

51 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

52 Yeah, great work.
53

54 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

55 You do an excellent job with getting baby-sitting for them; with
56 childcare for them? Four months is about what I have to deal with

1 in trying to get people some assistance in childcare.

2

3 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

4 And we're working with a childcare list, with a childcare council
5 who's also been excellent.

6

7 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

8 They're beautiful, yeah.

9

10 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

11 Not every childcare provider will take, you know, subsidies and not
12 every -- you know, it's a lot. But we, you know, look, five
13 thousand people got a job last year.

14

15 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

16 Excellent work. Thank you.

17

18 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**

19 Thank you. Legislator Bergin.

12:12PM

20

21 **LEG. BERGIN:**

22 The income limit that you had just discussed, that's not set on the
23 county level, right, that's --

24

25 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

26 State.

27

28 **LEG. BERGIN:**

29 State, yeah.

12:12PM

30

31 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

32 And Senior Deputy Commissioner Evelyn Ortiz can sit with you and
33 anyone here and brief you on that and send you actually a brief on
34 that. So there's a sign-on letter if you want to sign on to, you
35 know, discuss.

36

37 **LEG. BERGIN:**

38 And does it vary from county to county because it's very expensive
39 to live on Long Island but it would be totally different if you
40 lived up in, like, you know, Erie County.

12:13PM

41

42 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

43 Is it okay if she comes up to answer that question?

44

45 **LEG. BERGIN:**

46 Yeah, sure.

47

48 **SENIOR DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ:**

49 Hello, so it's based on --

50

51 **LEG. BERGIN:**

52 Just state your name on the record.

53

54 **SENIOR DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ:**

55 My name is Evelyn Ortiz, Senior Deputy Commissioner. And it
56 doesn't vary by county based on -- in terms of the disregard itself

1 on the statewide level. So it's based on the income that's
2 stipulated by the state through the Social Service law from my
3 understanding. I mean, we can provide you with more information on
4 that but from what we have access to, it's based on what the limit
5 has been established by the State Social Service Law.

6
7 **LEG. BERGIN:**

8 It just seems so unfair because it's so expensive to live here on
9 Long Island. And then somebody who lives up in, say, you know,
10 Erie County could live a lot easier on that money. Thank you.

11
12 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**
13 Anything else?

14
15 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**

16 Thank you. You could continue unless anyone --

17
18 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

19 I'm through with my presentation.

20
21 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**

22 Okay.

23
24 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

25 Legislator?

26
27 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**

28 Legislator Hahn.

29
30 **LEG. HAHN:**

31 How many different programs have cliffs, you know, where -- like
32 the childcare cliff you discussed where subsidies just kind of fall
33 off once you make a certain dollar as opposed to, you know, a
34 really slow incline in earnings and then a slow decline in reducing
35 the services makes more sense than hitting a cliff and losing
36 everything because you made one extra dollar.

37
38 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

39 All the public assistance system is a cliff. And poverty on Long
40 Island in specific, you know, as Legislator Bergin alluded to
41 because of the cost of living, poverty is a wall that you can climb
42 a hundred times. And unless we provide some additional assistance,
43 no one can get over it, right. And this is why the earn and learn
44 model is the one thing we've got because then we're saying, "all
45 right, you know, we'll give you a pay check to get onto a better
46 job" and we partner with, you know, like Island Harvest has this
47 program that they just launched to do warehousing and food safety
48 training, right, and someone's getting paid and then they're
49 immediately getting a job after, right.

50
51 So it's -- the cliff -- there is no gradual, right. There's
52 occasional, you know, opportunities like, you know, changing the
53 poverty level for childcare subsidy, but it's all temporary. And
54 the thing we're constantly trying to navigate in employment
55 services is band-aiding and, you know, okay, *this is ending and now*
56 *we have to find different money* -- and, you know, we can't

1 consistent -- it's -- I'm trying to -- and this is why private
2 funding would be helpful, the private funders don't have
3 stipulations and will make a five-year commitment. And then we can
4 really get something going. But it's, like, you know, oh, we have
5 the most creative and committed staff constantly looking for, *all*
6 *right this grant's ending, what do we do, find another source of*
7 *money.* And thank goodness we have staff that can do that because
8 these things come in waves but there is -- the only way to get
9 somebody out of poverty is to get them into a job that has a career
10 ladder and supports. And those employers that pay for education,
11 like those of you who know me, have heard me say, Estee Lauder, you
12 can become a mechanic at 18 to 20 dollars an hour with a high
13 school diploma and they'll pay for your degree. Well, I want to be
14 in that employer because then I can eradicate poverty. But we
15 really -- there isn't anything to my knowledge -- Evelyn, there
16 isn't anything that -- everything is cliffed, right? There is no
17 gradual. Right. So to my knowledge there isn't. It's all either
18 a wall or a cliff.

12:16PM

19
20 **LEG. HAHN:**

21 And the determination that a car is an asset is?

22
23 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

24 State.

25
26 **LEG. HAHN:**

27 State.

28
29 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

30 Yeah.

12:17PM

31
32 **LEG. HAHN:**

33 It's not -- or does it depend on the program?

34
35 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

36 I think it's all state. And, again, I think this is where we
37 should do a separate, you know, we can do it via Zoom or in person
38 really in depth look at those laws and get an overview and Senior
39 Deputy Ortiz can do that.

12:17PM

40
41 **LEG. HAHN:**

42 Yeah, because that we certainly should fight for Long Island on the
43 state level with that piece of information, especially individuals
44 who may find themselves laid off or domestic violence victims who,
45 you know, may own a car but, you know, you need -- you need to use
46 that car to get around as you just described. And it's critical
47 and it shouldn't be held against you that you have one here on Long
48 Island, especially --

49
50 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

51 Believe me, no one's doing this with a Mercedes, like, you know,
52 it's falling apart jalopy but it's considered an asset.

53
54 **LEG. HAHN:**

55 And even if they were, that's the problem with the whole viewpoint
56 is you can find yourself with four kids, no job and a slightly

1 overvalued car, but that overvalue in the car is really no good for
2 you, you need it to get around and it shouldn't be held against you
3 whatever it is. That's ridiculous. And we know that here on Long
4 Island.

5
6 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

7 So, you know, the housing staff is an issue because there's no --
8 you know, I talked to Commissioner Pierre, if your apartment
9 complex, you have a bunch of things happening at the same time.
10 You have empty nesters downsizing. So if you're in an apartment
11 complex, who do you want to rent to? Someone who sold their house
12 for, you know, a half a million dollars and have that money in the
13 bank? Or do you want to, you know, rent out to someone who's on
14 public assistance? And so this is what they're facing, like, we
15 can't find housing, you know, for a low enough -- people with low
16 income jobs. And I am not talking -- I am talking about working
17 poor, right. I'm talking about people who are working earning \$15
18 an hour on Long Island and there's no housing. And so they can
19 easily slip into becoming someone who winds up on public
20 assistance, not because they don't want to work but because the
21 cost of housing and the lack of housing stock.

22
23 **LEG. HAHN:**

24 Yes. And we're grateful that there are organizations trying to --
25 and elected officials trying to solve the housing crisis. And it's
26 going to take us all coming together to solve that. Is there a
27 bill to your knowledge to remove the car as an asset?

28
29 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

30 I think it's part of income disregard or -- do you want -- she
31 should just sit next to me. Thank you. Thank you.

32
33 **SENIOR DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ:**

34 Evelyn Ortiz again. There is also an asset limit bill that was
35 introduced by Senator Roxanne Persaud as well on the state side.

36
37 **LEG. HAHN:**

38 Excellent. Thank you. I would love to submit an all eighteen
39 letter, at least this Committee, something supporting those efforts
40 because it's particularly important to Long Islanders. Thank you.

41
42 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**

43 Thank you, Legislator Hahn. Legislator Kennedy.

44
45 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

46 So this bill is only in one house? It's not in both houses?

47
48 **SENIOR DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ:**

49 I don't have the exact status of where it is at this moment but we
50 can definitely provide you with that information.

51
52 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

53 That would be great. Thank you.

54
55 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**

56 Yeah, if you want to send that documentation to the Chair, this way

1 we could as a committee possibly support, you know, that particular
2 piece of legislation. If you just, you know, guide us in the
3 direction, we'd be happy to help support it.

4
5 **SENIOR DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ORTIZ:**

6 Thank you.

7
8 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**

9 Okay. Well, we thank you so much for coming in today and providing
10 all that information. I know you said you had the -- a packet for
11 us of the presentation. I think everyone would love to have a copy
12 of. And, again, thank you taking the time out and coming in and
13 putting together the presentation today.

14
15 **COMMISSIONER DRAGO:**

16 Thank you for having us and we'll hand it out and we'll also e-mail
17 it to you as well. Thank you.

18
19 **INTRODUCTORY RESOLUTIONS**

20
21 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**

22 Thank you. Moving forward we have no Tabled Resolutions. We'll
23 move into Introductory Resolutions, which there is one and is **IR**
24 **1106, Designating April 2, 2003 as "Education and Sharing Day" in**
25 **Suffolk County. (Esteban).**

26
27 **LEG. RICHBERG:**

28 2023, Mr Chair.

29
30 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**

31 2023, yes. What did I say? What did I say? (Laughter) I started
32 the meeting saying that today was February 15th so I may as well
33 stay in that -- I'll read the IR again. **Designating April 2, 2023**
34 **as "Education and Sharing Day" in Suffolk County. (Esteban).** Can I
35 get a motion?

36
37 (Legislator Krupski walked into the auditorium)

38
39 **LEG. BONTEMPI:**

40 I'll make a motion.

41
42 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

43 Second.

44
45 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**

46 Motion by Legislator Bontempi and second by Legislator Kennedy.
47 All in favor? Any opposed? Abstentions?

48
49 **CLERK TASSONE:**

50 Seven. (VOTE: 7-0-0-1/PO McCAFFREY INCLUDED IN VOTE/LEG GONZALEZ
51 ABSENT)

52
53 **CHAIRPERSON MAZZARELLA:**

54 1106 is approved. Being no Procedural Motions, Home Rule Messages,
55 executive or Tabled Subject to Call resolutions, this Committee is
56 now adjourned.

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**THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 12:23 PM
{ } DENOTES SPELLED PHONETICALLY**