

**HEALTH, SOCIAL, EDUCATIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE MEETING  
HELD VIA AUDIO WEBINAR  
PURSUANT TO TEMPORARY EMERGENCY ORDERS**

**Chairwoman Sayegh, Legislators Addonizio & Albano**

**Thursday September 10, 2020**

**(Immediately Following the Rules Meeting beginning at 6PM)**

The meeting was called to order via audio webinar at 6:56 P.M. by Chairwoman Sayegh who requested that Legislator Albano lead in the Pledge of Allegiance. Upon roll call Committee Members Addonizio, Albano, and Chairwoman Sayegh were present.

**Item #3 - Approval of Minutes – July 23, 2020 & August 13, 2020**

The minutes were approved as submitted.

**Item #4 - Discussion/United Way of Westchester and Putnam’s ALICE Program/UWWP President and CEO Tom Gabriel**

Chairwoman Sayegh stated ALICE stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed residents who earn more than the poverty line but less than the cost of living.

UWWP President and CEO Tom Gabriel stated the ALICE research began more than a decade ago, in one New Jersey County, but has now spread to hundreds of United Ways, corporations, and foundations across 20 States. He stated a goal is to change the national dialogue around financial hardship. He stated ALICE families struggle to meet basic human needs such as housing, food, transportation, healthcare, and necessary technology. He stated when funds are short, these families are forced to make impossible decisions. He stated these people are preschool teachers, home health aides, and retail salespeople. He stated these workers are essential to keeping our communities and economies humming yet struggle to pay their basic bills. He stated Putnam County had a poverty rate of 5% in 2018, but 28% were considered ALICE. He stated seniors make up 27% of households in Putnam County, yet 43% of seniors in Putnam County are living below the ALICE threshold. He stated 70% of households headed by a single female, with children, are below the ALICE threshold. He stated 10% of households are Hispanic, but 45% of those households are ALICE. He added that ALICE households are consistently found in every community in Putnam County. He stated Kent has the highest percentage at 36% and Carmel has the greatest number of ALICE households with 3,812. He stated every town has between 31-36% of its households living below the ALICE threshold. He stated only three (3) of the 20 most common occupations in New York State are paid enough to support the household survival budget, which is an average of \$78,156 for a family of four (4). He stated in Putnam County the household survival budget is actually an average of \$109,236 for a family of four (4). He stated this is mainly because Putnam County does not have an urban center or a significant affordable housing base. He stated the cost of household basics for a family of four (4) increased 21% from 2010 to 2018. He stated this is mainly due to rising costs in childcare, healthcare, and the addition of technology which has now become a basic need. He

stated 25% of the workforce in Putnam County are full time, salaried positions and 26% are full time, hourly wage jobs. He stated a growing number of workers are paid hourly. He stated hourly workers are more likely to have fluctuations of income due to frequent schedule changes and variable hours. He stated they are less likely to receive benefits such as health insurance, paid time off, family leave, or retirement benefits. He stated Putnam County is built on small to medium businesses, which are less likely to offer benefits and are less stable than larger firms. He stated these are all reasons that are contributing to and perpetuating conditions for ALICE households. He added that while some circumstances are individual and by choice, a few systemic problems affect most ALICE households. He noted that this affects the entire community because ALICE households turn to services offered by schools and government, which are funded by the taxpayers. He stated if we can elevate those in ALICE and get them out of a constant state of crisis, then they will be more productive members of society and will contribute more to the local economy. He invites everyone to learn more about ALICE by visiting [www.uwwp.org/ALICE](http://www.uwwp.org/ALICE). He thanked the Legislature for the time.

Chairwoman Sayegh thanked President & CEO Gabriel for this report.

Legislator Albano stated it was very interesting to hear these statistics.

Legislator Addonizio thanked President & CEO Gabriel for the comprehensive report.

Chairwoman Sayegh stated she did go through some of the information on the website, including looking at Putnam County's in-depth breakdown by zip code. She stated there is also a part of the website at [uwwp.makingtoughchoices.org](http://uwwp.makingtoughchoices.org) to view the tough choices that would need to be made if you were under the ALICE threshold. She stated it is very interesting. She stated how COVID-19 will affect the ALICE statistics moving forward needs to be monitored. She questioned if there has been any indication of the affect so far.

President & CEO Gabriel stated normally these studies are done every two (2) years, but with COVID-19 and the economic impact, they have reconvened the ALICE Committee on a statewide level and are looking at doing an updated report. He stated the hope is to have an updated report by the end of the year or early 2021, which would incorporate the impact of COVID-19.

Chairwoman Sayegh noted that the United Way was instrumental in putting together a food bank in Putnam County during the pandemic. She stated she participated and saw firsthand how many people are in need of these services.

#### **Item #5 - Discussion/School Reopening Delays/Commissioner of Social Services Michael Piazza**

Commissioner of Social Services Michael Piazza stated the ALICE program is a great precursor to what he is discussing. He stated the food and economic insecurities have been spotlighted. He stated it drives the anxiety and depression that is emanating from the pandemic. He stated there are an average of 30 calls to 2-1-1 per month. He stated during the pandemic, the number of calls looking for food assistance increased, but the number of psychiatric calls did not.

He stated in August, 2-1-1 received 100 psychiatric crisis calls, which is a significant increase. He stated that is definitely being looked into as a community. He stated the lockdown and loss of contact has been hard for students, along with the inability to do things they used to. He stated in China, where the pandemic began, the lockdown lasted 33 days and 22% of the population reported depression and 19% expressed anxiety. He stated the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) has reported that in the USA, 30% of people have reported anxiety and 13% have reported that they have turned to alcohol or drugs to cope. He stated 25% of young adults have contemplated suicide during the pandemic. He stated adults are becoming very depressed due to the economic stress of the pandemic, because they feel like they cannot provide for their family. He stated young children have expressed concerns about their grandparents becoming infected with COVID-19 and dying. He stated not a day has gone by without dialogue between the schools and the mental health agencies, about what students are facing. He stated even in normal years there is anxiety with school starting again, but it is different now after being out for six (6) months. He stated according to a Boston University study, the pandemic has tripled the depression rates for all ages. He noted that children are picking up the tension in their parents. He added that children have issues keeping to a schedule when they are at home. He stated the Department of Social Services (DSS) is trying to make themselves as available as possible for families.

Chairwoman Sayegh thanked Commissioner Piazza for the helpful information. She questioned if schools will still be helping to provide meals for children, even when they are not in school.

Commissioner Piazza stated it is his understanding that the schools will continue the food programs even when the kids are home. He stated it is something that DSS is prepared to help with as well.

Chairwoman Sayegh stated parents are trying to juggle a lot this year. She questioned what resources are available to help parents, such as childcare.

Commissioner Pizza stated there is subsidized childcare, but it is contingent on meeting financial criteria. He stated they are trying to get the word out that there is childcare available and noted that some childcare agencies have not closed during the pandemic. He urged anyone in need of childcare to contact the Dutchess Child Care Council, who DSS partners with.

Legislator Albano stated it is amazing what is in place to deal with an almost impossible task.

Legislator Addonizio questioned what happens when parents or caregivers cannot get to the schools to pick up the food from the meal programs.

Commissioner Piazza stated it depends on each school. He stated DSS has not been notified of any issues like that, because they would help if any issues arose.

Chairwoman Sayegh stated she would like to recognize the hard work that the DSS does. She stated she appreciates all the hard work behind the scenes.

**Item #6 - Approval/Fund Transfer 20T153/Health Department/Cover COVID Related Expenses for Cleaning and Preparing Buses**

Chairwoman Sayegh stated this transfer is for \$20,713 and is going through the Transportation Department.

Legislator Addonizio noted that there is zero fiscal impact.

Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to move Fund Transfer 20T153 to the Audit & Administration Committee meeting; Seconded by Legislator Albano. All in favor.

**Item #7 - FYI/Budgetary Amendment 20A049/Health Department/Award provided by Health Research Inc./NYSDOH for Increased Capacity to Conduct Case and Contact Investigations**

Chairwoman Sayegh stated this grant is going to be used to increase nursing staff to add three (3) part time positions. She stated it will also be used for overtime due to the pandemic, and for laptops and computers for the nursing staff. She stated this is an amazing grant for \$360,136 and will be put to good use.

**Item #8 - FYI/Household Hazardous Waste Drop Off/October 3, 2020 – Duly Noted**

**Item #9 - Other Business – None**

**Item #10 – Adjournment**

There being no further business at 7:33 P.M. Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to adjourn; Seconded by Legislator Albano. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Administrative Assistant Ed Gordon.