

NYPWA Commissioners' Meeting Summary

Presiding: President Eileen Tiberio

Thursday, September 8, 2022

Welcome & Conferences

- Eileen Tiberio & Mike McMahon
 - Think about an initiative your county started that worked really well. Would you be willing to present it at our next conference?
 - Local presentations were vibrant. People want more. So much is learned from sessions and side conversations. We urge you to consider being a presenter. When we share our experiences, everyone benefits.
 - New fiscal managers loved the fiscal sessions – would like to see more of these.

Administrative Burden & Plan Requirements

- Rental Supplement Plan – Endless demands for changes to plan – “Make Work.” Some counties recently approved after over 6 months; some are still pending. The plan itself is far too restrictive. Recommend that we engage in problem-solving with OTDA on what needs to change to enable more people to benefit. Also, share local strategies on who we can help with this funding. The state’s expectations don’t match reality of the plan.
- DOB staff have expressed interest in visiting local districts and shelters in capital region.
- Discussed benefits and difficulties of using HMIS for data and to track outcomes.
- Housing Plans, Code Blue Plans – cut and paste and cut and paste some more.
- “Nudge” book by Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein. Opposite of Sludge.
- What can DSS stop doing? If state keeps adding work, something has to stop.
- Case reviews added to Child Family Plan requirements.
- Extra demands to promote child care, but still lack providers.
- How do we break the make-work cycle? Discuss at commissioners’ convening.

Housing

- Evictions are back – what strategies are you pursuing? RSP money is too late for many.
- It would be useful to put together actual cases of families who need help and yet cannot be helped due to plan restrictions. The RSP system does not mirror real life.
- Do we need more flexible rules for DV shelters, shelters, hotels/motels? Example of DV shelter space being denied for being short by 8 feet. But we need a place to keep people safe and this rule gets in the way of safety.
- Counties without shelters and local opposition continues
- ERAP - people were saved from eviction but there is a huge need for low cost housing.
- Asylum seekers arriving in NYC from Texas – lack of housing to meet their needs.
- NYC - Arriving hungry with nothing but clothing on their backs. Providing medical care, food, water, opening up emergency hotels. Also, in Washington DC and Chicago.

- 20% increase in homeless due to asylum seekers. Asking OTDA – what easements, waivers and resources (\$) can be provided – also talking to feds.
- Sanctuary Cities: From Center for Immigration Studies. <https://cis.org/Map-Sanctuary-Cities-Counties-and-States> depends on local laws, but the list includes Albany, Columbia, Franklin, Ithaca, Nassau, NYC, Onondaga, St. Lawrence and Westchester.
- Some shelters are closing due to inability to hire staff. Others limit hours open.
- Let's problem solve. State's expectations for housing don't match what rules let us do.
- Housing Plans - sent code blue in to one person and housing plan went to someone else. What does OTDA do with info. – do they just store the plans?

TA Eligibility

- Submitted suggestions on streamlining to OTDA after summer conference. Continue discussion at Commissioners Convening.
- Instead of having each county submit a waiver – issue statewide approval – less work for county and for state.
- OCFS has said they will streamline requirements and are discussing ideas with feds. Staff may fear that if they stop doing one thing, it will lead to stop doing the next thing and continue until it goes too far – but something has to change.
- We need a task force on administrative relief.
- Our difficulty in attracting and sustaining an adequate number of staff will continue.

Services

- Supported Decision-Making - NYPWA issued recommendations to OCFS and OPWDD on future regulations to be drafted instead of waiting for formal comment period.
- “The Road to Quality Representation” Series of lunch-time webinars offered by State Agencies. Focus is on Parents' legal representation only.
- NYPWA Submitted Formal Comment on Proposed OCA Rule 205.19 on August 2, 2022; indicated that OCA exceeded its authority – but that won't stop rule.
- Many concerns with OCA rule including insufficient number of attorneys.
- Gun Reform Law <https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/policies/external/2022/inf/22-OCFS-INF-10.pdf>
- Long Stayer Reviews – local experiences – OCFS keeps looking for data on cases when an alternate placement has been achieved.
- Cross Systems/Kids with Complex Needs. The number of kids is under-estimated because only about 20% of cases are reported to the hard to place committee since committee is minimally able to help. It is recommended that you report cases to the Interagency Resolution Unit (Hard-to-Place Committee) so data reflects the real numbers. See link <https://www.ccf.ny.gov/search-results/?q=hard+to+place>
- Adoptions subsidies went up 30% based on OCFS lawsuit settlement.
- Foster care – need to know criteria for eligibility for extraordinary rates.

Medicaid (Proposed Medicaid enrollment rule on streamlining the application process)

<https://public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2022-18875.pdf>

Basically, it will enable NYS Exchange to take over all of Medicaid, including non-MAGI cases, much faster. It will also increase enrollees and cost. This rule will eliminate obstacles that make it harder for eligible people to remain enrolled, particularly those individuals who are exempted from MAGI and did not benefit from the earlier enrollment simplifications.

Workforce Challenges & Strategies

Are all OCFS staff positions non-competitive and not required to take a civil service test? If so, why do local DSS staff and caseworkers have requirements that exceed state agency staff? We need much more flexibility in order to address staff shortages. NYS Civil Service is working on a Training & Experience exam for caseworkers. They will need local input to get it right.

TA-side – what waivers can we obtain? We cannot fill staff vacancies. Need to spend time helping people without housing and processing applications. We don't have time for extra work.

Counties are freeing up “sludge,” but we need the state to do it too. It is like making a sauce – you always put a teaspoon of this spice in – can you taste it? No. Then why do you keep doing it?

Speaking of spices, one county's non-secure detention facility, was cited for an “expired spice.” And yet, Old Spice is not a safety issue.

Montgomery is using “stay interviews,” New Orientation program, more succession planning.

Chenango – focus on retention. Middle-management, supervisors. 16-week leadership curriculum at local community college. Half-day each week. Hope to measure efficacy. Possibly have the people who did it do a workshop at NYPWA. Beyond teamwork. Getting down to “when you become a supervisor – you don't do your own job anymore, move from you to “us” – move to aggregate thinking. Supervisor has to get involved in DSS system-wide view. Practical course. What are you responsible for and how are you doing it? Need people to be excited about being a supervisor, but what makes it work? Elephant in the room – they all came from union-side. Now it's a different dance, you are not part of the proletariat. Budding leaders are doing well when they move beyond the practice of simply taking everything to the union.

Ontario Co. adapted Marine Corp training manual concepts to DSS on how to be a good supervisor and coaching. It was well received. Some leadership training is too esoteric; looking for how more on “how to” supervise. How do you know workers are getting their work done?

Westchester split its human resources division into two. Staff development division is retraining up to director level to encourage people to figure out what is needed and move ideas forward.

Need bold ideas. Takes too long to schedule a civil service exam and then too long to score it. It isn't working. After “X” months, make provisional appointment permanent, if it is due to state civil service inability to offer tests and score them.

Commissioners' Reference Document for Discussion on September 8, 2022

1. Administrative Burden & Plan Requirements

Challenges:

The number of times that plans are reviewed and returned with requests for changes is a key source of frustration. The time spent on plan preparation may exceed the dollar value of the allocation. On both the TA and Services side, often the service delivery is contracted out to a private agency while the administrative tasks are carried out by the local DSS. Counties may receive little state reimbursement in spite of many hours of work. The current process of back and forth for revisions is not a good use of state staff time or local DSS staff time. The number of plans required has increased over the past several years. We have the Employment Plan, the Homeless Plan, the Rent Supplement Plan, The Code Blue Plan, Emergency Shelter Grant Plan, Fraud Plan, the Adoption/Kinship Plan, the Program Quality Improvement Plan, the Raise the Age Plan, the future Lower the Age Plan. Also, additions to existing plans, such as, adding case reviews as part of child family services plan.

Ideas:

With each new requirement, consider “How does this requirement impact our ability to serve people on a local level? Does it free up time to help the public or does it require additional layers of documentation and administrative work? Is there another approach that would support local implementation of the rules so that they can in turn, support the children, adults and families in their communities?” If a detail is mandatory, it can be noted in the initial state agency communication.

2. Children's Services

Challenges:

As the number of children in foster care dramatically declined, the children in care reflected a higher percentage of kids with complex needs. At the same time, the system that previously served these kids, such as, children's psychiatric inpatient care, has shrunk. Lacking the services that these kids need they are more likely to end up in the juvenile justice system. Approved preventive programs under Family First are scarce.

Ideas: (not about more meetings; need to identify dates for implementation of each idea)

- * Approve innovative projects proposed by providers quickly
- * Reestablish blended funding by multiple state agencies
- * Establish OPWDD-OMH-OCFS Joint Licensure
- * Provide emergency residential placements – instead of hospitals.
- * Provide residential programs for the most challenging kids: Relatives, foster parents and agencies turn away kids who exhibit aggressive behaviors.
- * Expand approved programs and provide start-up and ongoing funding for new models that can serve as prevention programs under Family First.
- * Encourage districts to report their Hard to Place Cases to the Council on C&F Committee.

3. Housing - Challenges: People cannot find a place to live on the low rental allowance and communities oppose shelters and apartments for people of very low income. Many evictions are on the horizon.

Ideas: Raise state share for SNA/raise rental allowance. Pass State legislation to support housing - similar to the Padavan Selection Law of 1978 that was enacted to balance the interests of communities with the rights of people with disabilities during deinstitutionalization. Plan for the evictions coming our way – are there untapped state resources (land, unoccupied buildings, \$)

4. Temporary Assistance

Challenge: Eligibility Process is Cumbersome and Time Consuming for Workers. Ideas:

- Time and energy that goes into a case that gets a grant of less than \$50. Why do we even need a phone interview? Can we make recertification schedule less frequent?
- NYC has streamlined the eligibility process through investments in technology and Access HRA, but other counties depend on the state to create and fund technology. Is there any help state can provide as IES functionality is not available yet?
- The state notices need to be available electronically. This is more effective in reaching people and more secure and reliable than surface mail. Increases speed, they can retrieve them at any point. Can OTDA make this happen?
- Applications – Can OTDA change application to include email & cell number entry? Can applicants do more themselves? E.g., add their own change in address? Can we use a 6th grade reading level? Can we do more with robo calls? Can the systems more effectively inform people that they do not meet the eligibility criteria? 70% of applications are denied even when all documents are correctly submitted.
- Can OTDA approve outstanding waiver requests and provide all districts with information on waivers that have previously been approved and new waiver approvals? Can any of these waivers be statewide so that they don't require the lengthy approval process?

5. Workforce

Challenges: Many vacancies; many provisional appointments across all positions including eligibility workers and caseworkers. People don't want government jobs or to work in human services. They don't want promotions that add responsibility with only a little more money. Health care bonuses increased discontent.

Ideas:

- * Modernize civil service to make gov't positions competitive with private sector.
- * Statewide campaign to rebuild the perception that government jobs are worthwhile.
- * Find ways to reduce the administrative burden on these positions so that they can focus on spending time helping adults and families.
- * When the state gives health care bonuses, the state needs to include LDSS frontline staff
- * Promote positive image of DSS caseworkers, eligibility workers, and all we do.