

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

**Chairwoman Sayegh, Legislators Addonizio & Albano**

**Thursday**

**6:00PM**

**November 12, 2020**

The meeting was called to order via audio webinar at 6:03 P.M. by Chairwoman Sayegh who led in the Pledge of Allegiance. Upon roll call Committee Members Addonizio, Albano, and Chairwoman Sayegh were present.

**Item # 3 - Approval of Minutes – September 10, 2020 Meeting & October 9, 2020 Budget Meeting**

The minutes were approved as submitted.

**Item #8 - Other Business – Health Department Update – Increase in COVID-19 Cases**

Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to move Item #8 up in the agenda; Seconded by Legislator Addonizio. All in favor.

Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to waive the rules and accept the Other Business; Seconded by Legislator Albano. All in favor.

Chairwoman Sayegh stated Commissioner of Health Dr. Michael Nesheiwat provided comments to the Health Committee regarding this matter:

”With the rising numbers that we see, Putnam County Department of Health is working around the clock on comprehensive case investigations that help to isolate infectious individuals and allow for proper identification of contacts. We are concerned, but not surprised to see numbers are rising post-Halloween and as the colder weather approaches. We have been in frequent communication with the State regarding the regional impact of exposures related to travel sports and continue to urge all Putnam County residents to follow the New York State guidance which at this time does not allow for high-impact indoor athletic games such as basketball and ice hockey. Practice, train, and condition, but please do not participate in organized games that are prohibited by New York State at this time. Even if the games take place out of State. Social distancing and mask use have become second nature to most of us at this point and they remain the most effective ways to reduce the impact of this virus. We recognize the challenges that our residents continue to face. As we approach the holiday season, we want nothing more than to preserve the health and safety of our community members. For our residents on social media follow @putnamhealthny to get some ideas for how to approach the holidays this season and to stay up to date with public health alerts that may be issued related to exposures in our communities.”

Chairwoman Sayegh stated late this afternoon there was a request from Legislator Montgomery to have the Health Department come to discuss the current COVID status in Putnam County. She stated Dr. Nesheiwat suggested having Public Health Nurse and Public Information Officer Shanna Siegal speak with the Committee tonight. She thanked Ms. Siegel for attending and for all her hard work during this pandemic. She stated the weekly updates have been very important. She questioned if Ms. Siegel could provide a background on the current spike in COVID cases.

Ms. Siegel stated she spends most of her time now dealing directly with the schools. She stated the information she has is available to the public on the State's website. She stated the current 7-day rolling average is at a 4.1% positivity rate. She stated much of the increase is coming from social gatherings. She stated the sports participation is also contributing. She stated there have been instances where travel teams cause positive cases across multiple counties. She stated the increases are not unexpected but still unsettling. She stated the current positivity rate could result in being designated as a "yellow zone" if it occurs for 10 days straight.

Chairwoman Sayegh questioned if there is any clarification on the protocols for the schools and how their numbers are looking.

Ms. Siegel stated early in the pandemic, a school response team was formed, and she is the first point of contact for schools if they find that a student or staff member tested positive. She added that if they find someone in the schools may have been exposed, she notifies the schools. She stated there are weekly calls with school administrations. She stated the schools have been going above and beyond with following the State's protocols for keeping people healthy. She stated masks are required in all Putnam County schools in almost all situations. She explained the process after a school notifies her of a positive test including comprehensive case investigation and contact tracing. She stated when schools switch to remote learning, it can be done for a variety of reasons, including extra cleaning and personnel shortages from staff needing to be in quarantine.

Chairwoman Sayegh thanked Ms. Siegel for all that she does with the schools. She stated Dr. Nesheiwat has made it on the line and is available to speak.

Dr. Nesheiwat thanked Ms. Siegel for her overview and added that she is a key person in the Health Department. He stated a main reason for the uptick in COVID cases is social gatherings as well as travel sports. He stated we need to continue to social distance, wear masks, wearing goggles, and hand washing. He stated they are working to pinpoint exactly where the cases are coming from, as it may not be a problem in all of Putnam County. He stated the travelling due to the upcoming holidays is concerning. He noted that the Health Department makes recommendations to the School Superintendents, but it is up to them to implement the guidance, and the State has jurisdiction over the school districts. He noted that there is more information on the Health Department's website.

Chairwoman Sayegh stated she appreciates Dr. Nesheiwat's overview and for making himself available for this meeting. She requested that he discuss Governor Cuomo's recent recommendations and mandates regarding social gatherings.

Dr. Nesheiwat stated there are many recommendations and guidance on the Health Department website. He stated virtual gatherings have been recommended as well as gathering with only immediate family. He stated to keep practicing what has been recommended.

Ms. Siegel stated we know that there will be some people who are completely opposed to not seeing their family for the holidays, even though the Governor is implementing a 10-person limit in private residences. She stated most of the recommendations for that are hoping to minimize the risk. She stated they are suggesting having the gathering outdoors if possible, wearing masks, and seating people who live together at their own tables.

Dr. Nesheiwat stated we have to understand that people have elderly parents and grandparents. He stated the goal is to keep exposure chances low.

Chairwoman Sayegh questioned about establishments needing to close by 10pm.

Dr. Nesheiwat stated he believes it is due to gatherings that are not “dining” so there may be more exposure that way.

Legislator Albano stated it is good to hear that the Health Department is on top of everything.

Legislator Addonizio thanked the Health Department for their comprehensive report.

Legislator Gouldman stated after Election Day, a poll worker in Putnam Valley High School tested positive for COVID. He questioned what was the process after this notification.

Dr. Nesheiwat stated the Health Department reached out to Board of Elections and got a list of all the poll workers who were there and did contact tracing. He stated they did not contact the voters but did put out a health alert to make people aware. He noted that the poll worker wore a mask the entire time so there is little probability of wide spreading.

Legislator Gouldman thanked Dr. Nesheiwat for the information and added that the Health Department is doing a great job.

Legislator Montgomery requested clarification on who is doing the contact tracing for the County. She questioned if it is all being handled by the State.

Dr. Nesheiwat stated the nurses at the Health Department handle the contact tracing.

Ms. Siegel stated in most cases the State has contact tracers who do the follow-up contact tracing, however the nurses handle case investigation. She stated the County’s nurses are in constant contact with Putnam County residents who test positive.

Legislator Montgomery questioned how the metrics work, because the County is in day three (3) of being in the yellow zone. She stated it is her understanding that if these numbers hold for the next seven (7) days, some or all schools in Putnam County will be closed. She noted for

example that the positivity rate is higher in Carmel than in Philipstown. She questioned in this instance, would Haldane Schools need to close.

Ms. Siegel stated if certain metrics are reached in the entire County, all schools would go fully remote. She stated the Health Department has reached out to the State for clarification regarding these concerns, but do not have an answer yet.

Legislator Montgomery stated for the record she appreciates the information provided and requests that the Health Commissioner attend the Health Committee meetings every month.

Chairwoman Sayegh stated this has been discussed with the Health Department and it is based on many different schedules. She thanked the Health Department for their information this evening.

Legislator Jonke stated he received positive feedback from the Brewster School District Administration, who are very pleased with their interactions with the Health Department.

**Item #4 - Discussion/Update on Winter Homeless Shelters/Commissioner of Social Services Michael Piazza**

Commissioner Piazza stated the Health Department, especially Ms. Siegel and Dr. Nesheiwat, have been great partners to the Department of Social Services (DSS). He stated last year's homeless shelter, which was operated by the Brewster Emergency Shelter Partnership, closed early due to COVID-19 concerns. He stated a new group, Brewster Cares, plans to reopen the shelter beginning on December 7, 2020. He stated this group also plans to have a warming center available in the Village of Brewster. He stated this is very important this year due to many places not being open, such as libraries and fast-food restaurants. He stated these establishments do great services for the homeless. He stated there are still concerns over how COVID can spread in congregate care facilities like a shelter. He stated DSS is taking steps to make sure people who are symptomatic can be sequestered away from the others. He explained the various concerns with the State budget.

Chairwoman Sayegh questioned where people who are symptomatic or have tested positive will be placed in the interim.

Commissioner Piazza stated they will be placed in a motel, hopefully with funding from the State.

Chairwoman Sayegh questioned if Brewster Cares is a non-profit.

Commissioner Piazza stated it is and the County does not financially support the shelter, because then it would need to meet certain requirements.

Chairwoman Sayegh questioned if there is a way for generous individuals to assist with the shelter or warming center.

Commissioner Piazza stated he believes Brewster Cares can accept donations.

Chairwoman Sayegh stated there are so many wonderful non-profits in Putnam County.

Commissioner Piazza noted that they are helping many groups of people.

Legislator Gouldman questioned where homeless people or families on the west side of the County should go for assistance.

Commissioner Piazza stated they should contact DSS first and DSS would help them determine what services are available to them. He stated if it is a family, they will not go to the shelter, DSS will place them.

Legislator Gouldman thanked Commissioner Piazza for the information.

Legislator Montgomery requested clarification on potential State funding for Brewster Cares.

Commissioner Piazza stated he does not know the amount, but the amount last year was \$193,000. He noted that whatever is received must be broken out via an estimate of the number of days where the temperature is below freezing. He stated the plan that is submitted to the State is about helping to offset costs for the shelter and warming center.

Legislator Montgomery stated the County does not contribute funding to this. She expressed frustration that money is spent elsewhere.

Commissioner Piazza stated the Code Blue funding is a State mandate. He stated last year, the County spent approximately \$335,000 on shelter services.

Chairwoman Sayegh thanked Commissioner Piazza for all the information he provided.

**Item #5 - Discussion/County Opioid Quarterly Report Published July 2020 by New York State Department of Health/Commissioner of Social Services Michael Piazza**

Commissioner Piazza stated the Coroner's office gives DSS a monthly update on the number of unintentional fatal overdoses and the number of suicides. He stated this State report is close to the local numbers, but he believes the Coroner's report is more accurate. He stated the State report breaks down the heroin overdoses from the opioid overdoses. He noted that the State report is updated through December 2019. He stated in 2017 there were 24 overdose fatalities, in 2018 there were 18, and in 2019 there were 16, and in 2020 there have been seven (7) as of November 2, 2020. He stated the State report has figures on Narcan administration, which the County has been trying to get a better idea of. He stated DSS hopes that the more Narcan is available in the community will result in a reduction of accidental overdose fatalities. He stated the number of administrations of Narcan seems to be steady over the past few years.

Chairwoman Sayegh stated she is glad to see the number of deaths is decreasing and hopes it continues. She noted that with more Narcan kits being available to people who are trained to use it, this could result in less officially reported uses.

Commissioner Piazza stated that is possible.

Legislator Addonizio questioned COVID could have had an affect on the number of overdose deaths.

Commissioner Piazza stated there was definitely a lag in the beginning of the year. He stated there was also a decrease of suicides in the beginning of the year.

Chairwoman Sayegh stated this is very interesting information.

Commissioner Piazza stated they are concerned with people staying home more, potentially drinking and/or using drugs more often.

Chairwoman Sayegh thanked Commissioner Piazza for his insight.

#### **Item #6 - Approval/Office for Senior Resources/2020 Grant Application for RSVP Pandemic Augmentation**

Office for Senior Resources (OSR) Director Michael Cunningham stated this is an opportunity through the parent company of the RSVP program. He stated they are offering an additional \$5,000 with a focus on the use of technology by seniors. He stated OSR has been focusing on remote programming during the pandemic. He stated the interest and participation from seniors in this form of programming has been growing; and the seniors have become more skilled with technology. He stated they are now offering 50 programs per week and it will continue to grow.

Chairwoman Sayegh stated OSR is doing great work.

Legislator Nacerino stated this is a wonderful opportunity and the beginning of how things will be handled in the future.

Chairwoman Sayegh noted that she has a family member whose only way to communicate with family members currently is with her iPad.

Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to move Approval/Office for Senior Resources/2020 Grant Application for RSVP Pandemic Augmentation to the Full Legislative Meeting; Seconded by Legislator Albano. All in favor.

#### **Item #7 - Approval/Memorialization/New York State Senate Bill S6629 and Assembly Bill A9535/Nicole's Law/Provides for Intake and Discharge Procedures Regarding Individuals with Self-Inflicted, Life-Threatening Injuries**

Chairwoman Sayegh stated this bill is co-sponsored by Assemblyman Kevin Byrne, who she spoke to this evening about this matter. She stated Assemblyman Byrne indicated that it has not passed this year but will be revisited in January 2021. She stated this law is the result of a tragic suicide that was preceded by multiple suicide attempts. She stated this law would help suicide prevention by reforming hospital procedures involving the most vulnerable patients who have multiple episodes with self-inflicted life-threatening injuries. She explained how families would be involved in the care of these individuals.

Legislator Addonizio stated she is glad this is moving forward. She stated planning for the discharge of vulnerable individuals is very important.

Legislator Nacerino stated this is due to a very sad story and she fully supports this law.

Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to move Approval/Memorialization/New York State Senate Bill S6629 and Assembly Bill A9535/Nicole's Law to the Full Legislative Meeting; Seconded by Legislator Albano. Roll Call Vote: All Ayes. Motion Carries.

### **Item #9 – Adjournment**

There being no further business at 7:21 P.M. Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to adjourn; Seconded by Legislator Addonizio. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Administrative Assistant Ed Gordon.