

**HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE**  
Monday, January 12, 2026 - 10:30 AM

Davina Thurston, Chairperson  
Cathleen Reusser, Vice-Chairperson

Chairman Thurston called this Human Services Committee to order at 11:20 am with the following Supervisors in attendance: Clayton Barber, Matthew Brassard, Chris Clark, Timothy Follo, Kenneth Hughes, Mary Lamphear, Steve McNally, Clayton Menser, James O'Bryan, Timothy Pierce, Richard Preston, Cathleen Reusser, Matthew Stanley, Davina Thurston, Michael Tyler, Joe Pete Wilson and Meg Wood. Tracie McGill was absent.

Department Heads present: Angie Allen, Linda Beers, Jim Dougan, Judy Garrison, Krissy Leerkes and Mike Mascarenas. Terri Morse was excused.

Also present: William Tansey and Renee Bruno.

THURSTON: Good morning. We will now call human services committee to order and Angie Allen, I'm going to meet you right here at the front. Angie come on over. We would like to offer a certificate of appreciation for 20 years of outstanding service to Essex County to Angie Allen. She started here in 2006 so this is her 20<sup>th</sup> year here. Thank you Angie for all that you have done for Essex County and the residents of Essex County. Thank you.

ALLEN: Thank you very much. I wasn't expecting this. Wow, 20 years holy Toledo. One thing about twenty years though it really speaks to I started as a CPS frontline case worker for about twelve and actually Mr. Pierce was the one that hired me so you can thank him for my twenty years with you or be angry absolutely. I miss it though. I was actually a caseworker, the supervisor was gone and I said, hey, come talk to me and I had a case question next thing I know like twenty minutes later call this person, do this person and I really miss I'm a social worker at heart and I miss that direct line. Mike has to help me kind of balance it once in awhile with oh, but remember, you're an administrator. I loved the direct work so again, thank you for recognizing my work throughout the years to appoint me as the Commissioner so I appreciate that.

You've all received my report any questions before I kind of do little updates? As you will see, there is no hey, did you know so every month I kind of do a little snippet for someone to learn but I gave you today was an updated social services guide that breaks down every program that I oversee and it actually identifies a point person for you to call so that's why I figured to offer to go through the schmeel I like everyone else am looking forward to kind of meeting with you. We will be doing more of an overview on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January I believe so I'll see my good song and dance for then but I think what is the most important thing is there are people there with numbers call us, call me. There's a lot that we oversee and do. There's a lot of great things. There's a lot of bad things but all we can do is have you guys reach out, answer any questions, educate, educate the community so we can really keep the face of DSS so please utilize the guides. I do have them electronically as well so if you would like them electronically let me know and then the organization sheet is the very first one on the page and that just kind of breaks down it's a color kind of coordinated one that shows you all fourteen units so we do have ones who's employed where? I just didn't want to share that information today but if you would like a copy of who works where please let me know that as well.

THURSTON: Angie, I have a question and I was going to speak to you privately about this but it occurs to me that some other supervisors might at some time come into the same question. I

was recently approached by a gentleman whose pay got interrupted when the federal government shut down so his child's support was coming out of his check obviously with the shut down he wasn't getting a check so the child support wasn't being paid when it came back online he paid back immediately and then they took it again out of his paycheck so he actually double paid his child support and now he's not sure how to get that money back.

ALLEN: Okay I do not have that answer I'm not an expert in everything. I think I am but I'm really not but I will definitely, Taylor Strong oversees child support and I'll make sure she reaches out to you to get an answer and then once I learn that process I'll share it with everyone so that way if someone asks you, you can learn that process. I do have Renee Bruno who is my Deputy Commissioner who is waving her hand. So, everyone this is my Deputy, Renee Bruno.

BRUNO: Hi I'm Renee Bruno so for those of you that don't know me I've been with the county for 17 years. I'm fairly new in the Deputy Commissioner role, it's been a year so I'm still learning a lot of the services side of things. I'm more from the eligibility background which sort of includes child support. So, for questions like that you can refer people, there's a child support hotline which I think that number is on our website but it's always good to also reach out to our child support unit because they can work hand in hand.

THURSTON: Thank you.

WOOD: I just wanted to suggest that you just automatically send this electronically to everyone?

ALLEN: Sure, absolutely. Any other questions?

BRASSARD: Angie, I see the state owes us \$1.9 million that's not a surprise but is that a typical number for that time of year? Is it back more than normal?

ALLEN: So, how it is it's all through claiming so it's always what's owed and we know the state they expect us to move at the speed of lightning and they like to save all the money that they can and get their most bang for the buck so if you see over the last couple of years we do go between one million to a million there is no really good way to estimate it other than what our claiming process is.

MASCARENAS: Yeah, kind of, sort of what that number represents is a difference in what our RAP resource allocation package which would be they're grant funded typically for each program. Once the federal shares are paid it then rolls over into different percentages that \$1.9 million is typically the settlement. We get one big check a year from the state for CPS it's 67.5% for child support it's 62% so what you end up seeing is that gets dragged out for up to 22 months and you're always going to have that large number sitting there. During Covid it got even larger but yes, would we like them to pay it more quickly? Absolutely but it's not uncommon to have that settlement be out there so they disqualify claims, they come back, they make you fix claims depending on what a child qualified for, there's a lot there that goes on in terms of coding everything in DSS there's an F code combination that you utilize which properly then channels a claim. It's very complicated I'm happy to get into more detail with you on why that's basically that settlement.

BRASSARD: Yeah, I just wanted to make sure that \$1.9 is normal.

MASCARENAS: Yes. It's on our radar. We look at it. You'll see it change every month as more

claims come in and are taken off that list.

ALLEN: Any other questions before I just have one kind of update that is not on my report for you? Just so you are aware I can speak more this on an individual basis but I'm sure you are aware what's on the news when it comes to the federal freeze and states. Five states have been identified, New York was one in terms of freezing and the child care block grant and TANF and money assistance and some things for our people. There was a court order the court did put a freeze on that directive from the federal government. I'm learning more. I'm meeting today and tomorrow to learn more about that. Just so you are all aware everything that they would not give us is still a mandated service that we would have to provide so then it then becomes a cost shift so I don't want anyone to worry that services would not be provided just it would be more of a burden for the county residents of Essex County. We don't know where it's going to go. We all know the political landscape right now; we all have our own opinions and I'm not sharing mine but the people in our county will still get served and I think that's the most important thing about that. Any questions? I do have more information I can give you exactly what it is they are talking about I actually have a hand out. Why don't I just email it to you guys anyways that way if someone asks you, you can have it but it breaks down all the different categories and what does that actually mean.

MASCARENAS: Just so everybody understands when we budget those funds DSS is one of our larger departments in terms of levy, in terms of reimbursements they receive somewhere around 8 million dollars a year. Here we are on January 12 our budget is eleven days old, what we put in the budget is based on prior years and when we do that we look at five years comparison what do we get then all of sudden by January 12 the rules change in the middle of the game so those are things we deal with quite often. I'm not overly concerned about it right now. If it goes on a few months I'll get more concerned about it but this is for me a blip on the radar we'll monitor the situation, we'll see where it lands and go forward with that but just so you know this is kind of regular occurrence. April we'll get another surprise when the state budget comes out our fiscal years just aren't the same.

ALLEN: So, my last order of business for those of you that have been here awhile you know, for the new one's congratulations you get to have at least a laugh on a Monday every month. Well, maybe I hope it will be a laugh for some of you it's a roll of the eyes but I laugh bad dad jokes and our business is so heavy all the time that we deserve a moment to just giggle right? So, what happens when a frog is illegally parked? It gets towed away.

THURSTON: Terri has been excused from the meeting today. So, we'll go over to Linda Beers.

BEERS: Hello everybody so nice to see new faces and the familiar crew. I'm going to shorten this up because I'm going to meet with you but I did want to thank my existing board and the new board and tell you that I've been here 15 years and in 14 of them I've been the Public Health Director I'm probably one of the longer lasting health directors that are here and I'm honored to do so. In public health, the Essex County public health department looks different than other health departments I say, it's in my house so in our house we have a certified home health agency, that is a skilled nursing service, we have public health which is what people really think that is communicable disease, rabies and all of those. I also have children services which is early intervention and preschool and I also have WIC which is women, infant and children. You have my report in front of you it will go out email. We put a lot of charts and graphs in our data so I just wanted to share that it looks different in color and a few things. I'm not going to go over my whole report next month, I figured you would be bombarded today so next month I will break down what

each one of our departments do but we also, mark your calendars because Krissy Leerkes and I share a building and just on a separate note I would really like to see under Mike's leadership, I think you should all know that all of us as department heads really work together, we are really a tight group of folks. We consult with each other; we really try to not duplicate services and work in unison for all the people of Essex County. If Terri was here today we would be giving her a hooray too so we really work in collaboration trying to enhance each other's offices and departments so I am pleased and always proud to say. On February 9, Krissy Leerkes and I would like to invite you after this meeting to our department. We don't sit in the main campus which I refer to as the bricks we're down on Water Street on February 9<sup>th</sup> we invite all the old supervisors past and all the new ones and we'll do what we like to call speed dating every fifteen minutes or maybe ten depending on how many come we'll make a baiting lure the next department, the next department, next department so we'll assure that you'll see everyone of our departments in our building and you'll meet our staff and get a quick overview of what we do so, again, February 9 we encourage you to come it's always been a lot of fun.

One of the things that I will call out is under the public health department we just finished up community health assessment, we do that with our area hospitals. The deadline was 12/30 kudos to Andrea Whitmarsh she worked the Christmas break to make this all happen. We have an unexpected glitch in our hospital system one of our colleagues had a terrible horrific family accident and really, Andrea stepped into that role to get it all together in time and make our deadline for the state. Why is that important to you the community health assessment is an assessment of local data. Every realm that you can even think of and you will find a huge tool while you're writing grants and everything else for your own towns. So, I call that out to you in a big accomplishment this year last year, going into this year and with that I will close with we also did DSS does a fund drive, a family Christmas drive and asked if we and our women, infant and children we got all of our toys locally from people here in our community and our people we served 120 families, 280 children. Our families have to come, they shop, they pick out their own presents for their own children. They wrap them up when they are there and they know what it is that they are giving them they pick out gifts that they feel, trust me I'm always amazed what calls to a parent or what the kiddo really likes its not at all what you'd expect. We get a lot of random gifts and so it's a wonderful thing to be a part of.

Again, I'm honored to be here. I look forward to representing you and I leave you with this, you play a dual role here for me and unlike maybe any other department this county, the Essex County Board Supervisors is also the Essex County Board of Health. You wear two hats here and we'll talk more about that but you assign somebody to my department and they sit as your liaison on my board usually the head of Lake Placid so welcome and we have meetings four times a year but you really – during Covid obviously we needed lots of guidance and support and my hats off to Shaun Gilliland who was your predecessor who really stepped up to the that role so again, lots to do with this board and I look forward to doing it.

TYLER: Is there a time on the 9<sup>th</sup> or is it an all-day affair?

BEERS: I thought we would do it right after this meeting unless you would like to do something else?

TYLER: No, I was just curious.

BEERS: Yeah, we'll do it after this meeting is over you guys can come down and we'll do it right afterwards.

TYLER: Perfect.

MENSER: Have you ever considered applying to the toys for tots' program for kids?

BEERS: Yes, Angie Allen's group does that through DSS, it is in her report and she saw one thousand plus families and such and she delivers that to each town. We do it differently. We do it with women, infant and children on income base but we've never turned down anybody but we give away coats and boots and stuff like that as well so thank you. Great question.

THURSTON: Any other questions for Linda?

BEERS: My one closing thing I would like to talk to Chris Clark and Ms. McGill and Ike when you guys leave I just want to give you a sheet of paper about potentiality of something I have in the works. Thank you.

THURSTON: Thank you. Krissy Leerkes, Office for the Aging welcome.

LEERKES: Good morning. So, you have a copy of my report. Just a couple of highlights, updates is I've been talking the last couple of months about our health insurance our HIICAP program who in my report you'll see that we saw a very large increase in need do to many of the Medicaid Advantage plans not renewing in 2026 so the annual open enrollment period ended first week in December we rolled right into last week around the first, into the Medicaid advantage open enrollment and where in years past it was kind of a quiet time, it is not quiet. It is getting to be just as a heavy like our open enrollment time frame was because right now is the time for those individuals that did not look at their coverage for 2026, they are trying to get their medications when all of a sudden they were paying \$10 now they are paying \$200 so fortunately we have this window that individuals are able to come to our office or meet with them over the phone or wherever is the best place we can work on getting them enrolled and choose some coverage for February 1<sup>st</sup>. So, if you're hearing any of your constituents that lost their coverage for whatever reason always refer to us. For new supervisors we are not affiliated with any insurance company, we are 100% unbiased so Mr. Mascarenas came in and said I lost my coverage we would give him all the information that he needed pertinent to all the different plans that he was eligible for and all the information that he can make the best decision for himself. So, always refer to us. New supervisors again, Linda mentioned that we'll be our office will be open next month to go over a more detailed overview of our services but you'll learn that our Office for the Aging is a little bit different than many other counties where we don't have our staff specialize in one actual program area, they are the jack of all trades for all of our programs so for instance Heidi in our office she covers Schroon Lake, Minerva and Newcomb so she is the go to person for all of our adults in that area so if a person needed home delivered meals, health insurance counseling, assistance applying for HEAP and SNAP she would be that one person verses four so you'll learn and meet your contact person over the next couple of months they should be stopping in and meeting with you or your town hall staff on at least a quarterly basis but we're always available. Lastly, in Angie's report and Linda just mentioned the Christmas season and giving away gifts to those children in our area, we are very fortunate the last couple of years that some of our county staff actually contacted me and they wanted to adopt an older adult so we were very fortunate that many of our older adults that don't have family that really we are their family, we were able to deliver some really awesome gifts and we had a gentlemen that may have borrowed a grocery cart from a local store that he borrowed it, he has since given it back but he struggled to get down to the basement of his apartment building to do his laundry. So fortunately, the store let him borrow the cart but he was adopted for Christmas this year and he received an absolutely amazing rolling laundry cart with all the items that he would need for probably a year to do laundry and it brought tears to his eyes. He actually you'll note that in the last page on the front page, he is

actually our client satisfaction survey that's him what he says about our office so that's all I have. Any questions?

THURSTON: I have a question and I love to hear that story with the Christmas. It occurs to me and I certainly don't want to put more work on you or your staff but you know how we have like the ornaments with the kids, could we do something like that for the seniors?

LEERKES: Yup. So a couple, I don't even know how long ago Mike you would have to chime in here, maybe about over the summer there is a handful of employees that are working together kind of like a county employee engagement team and we put out the food boxes, we just did a wreath decorating contest, the pumpkin you'll see it on the Essex County New York Government Facebook page so that's something that we're working on because some of the funds from the wreath decorating contest they were also donated to our office and we purchased stamps because again, our older adults they maybe on limited financial ability to purchase things like to get to the post office so we have talked about that in doing an actual ornament type thing for older adults as well.

THURSTON: Thank you. Anyone have any questions?

TYLER: I'm not on this committee but I would like to just urge all of especially the new supervisors to use this department because for the elderly and especially for Medicare and all that stuff I reached out believe it or not I've even reached out to them it's hard to believe but it's a great resource and you should make that phone call it can help a lot of people in your town that's for sure.

MASCARENAS: I don't think, Krissy how many Medicare programs did our region lose for this year? Right, I don't think people realize just how difficult this year was in particular with the changes that were made and the impact it had to those individuals that live here. I don't mean to put you on the spot but -

LEERKES: There was a significant amount. There was probably around seven plans that did not renew and of those seven plans a few of them were PPO's or preferred provider organizations which gives a lot of stability to older adults, they don't have to worry about that in and out of network coverage many of those plans were also either zero premium or \$10 which is a huge, huge health savings when it comes to paying for insurance. The other issue that we ran into is 4-20-26 there's eighteen actual Medicare advantage plans that are being coverage and those are either HMO's, PPO's, Dual SNIPS or special needs plans for people on Medicare or Medicaid over half of those plans are with an insurance company that would not be made that a very large medical provider in our region and in another state do not accept so that is a huge other issue so even if their plan was renewing they may have not been able to see their local emergency room, they may have not been able to see their current primary care provider so that threw in a whole other road block for us so 2026 was definitely a year of major health insurance changes and it's not just Essex County it's across the state a lot of other counties saw a lot of the same issues that we did.

THURSTON: Does anyone have any other questions for Krissy?

WOOD: You mentioned, shall not be named. I think they should be named and shamed. Is there a regulation against that?

LEERKES: So, no it's not just the insurance companies' fault either there's a lot of different players in the game when it comes to insurance. Even with our county insurance we may see that some networks may not be, we did see a lot of changes to united health care you'll see that over the last couple of years especially with employer based united health care plans they may have not been accepted with UVM. You'll see that in 2026 if you go to different insurance websites including WellCare you'll see that some of their network has changed so the University of Vermont Medical Center may not be accepting WellCare.

WOOD: I understand that but the more the public knows the more they can advocate for some kind of reform for this local lack of consistency.

MASCARENAS: Yeah and I think the difficulty really is placing blame on either side it's really kind of mutual thing when you have millionaires fighting with millionaires right over one side is trying to save money and the other side is trying to maximize what they receive in reimbursement for the service they are providing and they often land at a standstill in terms of that and the option becomes well, we're not going to accept your insurance.

WOOD: I understand that but education is key.

MASCARENAS: Yeah it is and we deal with that regularly even with our own PPO plan and that is a really good plan it's not accepted everywhere. The state of health care is in a bad way and it's going to continue to be that way until somebody figures it out.

LEERKES: And I would just strongly encourage everybody to contact us because for instance, the Medicare Advantage plan is completely different from a stand alone prescription plan so where a large medical provider may not accept the advantage plan, the prescription side of the plan would still be recognized with our pharmacy so when in doubt always refer them back to us even if they are questioning oh, I'm paying more at the pharmacy right now than I was last year it could be multiple different reasons and we can explain that to them.

THURSTON: Any other questions for Krissy? Thank you.

Okay, so at this time I just wanted to make a little statement to the new supervisors that are here. As you can see there's a lot to do a lot of work that goes into sitting on this board, this is a very important part of your job as a town supervisor in Essex County. You're hearing a lot of different things from a lot of different committees and one thing that I want you all to know is Essex County and every town in Essex County is very, very lucky and I've said this before and I will say it again here now to you all, you can pay someone to do a job but you can't pay someone to care and the ladies that are the department heads for the Human Services committee all care about their jobs as I think most of the employees here at Essex County are very caring individuals. You all care that's why you're here, that's why we are all elected we are in the service industry, we serve our people and I just hope that you recognize all of our department heads from Mike all the way down and if you need help don't hesitate to call any of the supervisors that are here if we can't help you we'll find someone who can and the same thing goes for all the department heads, if someone calls your town, needs help from the Office for the Aging call Krissy. She will help so we're all here together we're all team Essex County and I would like to welcome you all and thank you. Is there anything else to come before this board today? We are adjourned.

As there was no further discussion to come before this Human Services committee it was adjourned at 11:50 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Garrison, Clerk  
Board of Supervisors