

**CITY OF PITTSBURGH/ALLEGHENY COUNTY
TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES**

February 28, 2005

MINUTES

- Location:** First Floor Conference Room
Civic Building, 200 Ross Street
Pittsburgh, PA
- Members Present:** John Tague, Chairperson, Aurelia Carter, Liz Healey, Milton Henderson, Katherine D. Seelman
- Members Absent:** Paul O'Hanlon, Co-chair, Ruth Walter Brenyo, Linda Dickerson, Rich McGann, Jeff Parker, Penny Perlman
- Others Present:** Jennifer Behun, Chuck Keenan, Rob A. Kohlmeyer, Jerry Laychak, Richard Meritzer, Amanda Monroy, Lisa Moses, David Rosenblatt

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Tague at 1:17 PM.

Approval of the agenda:

Mr. Tague pointed out that Mr. O'Hanlon and Judy Barricella were not able to attend the meeting so the items on Disability Connections, Voting Update and the Consolidation Plan would be postponed. Ms. Healey asked that we add a discussion on the proposed Medicaid cuts under new issues. Dr. Seelman asked that we also have a discussion on Consolidated Block Grants under new business.

Introductions:

All members and guests introduced themselves.

Approval of November 2004 Minutes:

Mr. Henderson moved that THE MINUTES BE APPROVED AS SUBMITTED. Dr. Seelman seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Financial Report:

Mr. Parker was unable to attend the meeting but submitted a report which Mr. Tague read (see attached). Part of the report was a discussion of who should write up a description of accomplishments for the Annual Report. Mr. Tague asked Ms. Healey and Dr. Seelman to write up the section on the public hearing. Ms. Healey said she would do that as part of the strategic plan section of the annual report. Mr. Tague pointed out that this report should be issued either before or at the Annual meeting. The Task Force members should start to plan the annual meeting. Ms. Healey suggested that there should be two separate committees to plan the annual meeting and draft the annual report. Mr. Meritzer will send out an email soliciting participation. Mr. O'Hanlon would draft the section on visitability and Mr. Tague and Mr. Parking would draft the section on Gil Slaters speaking. The report will include the selection of the new members.

Nominating Committee:

Dr. Seelman explained the process. The committee included Ms. Carter, Ms. Healey, Mr. Tague and her. They looked at the current Task Force and identified groups that were lacking representation. They solicited candidates from these groups. Resumes were reviewed and the committee selected Eugene Barton and Viswa P. Mohanty. Mr. Barton has already expressed his willingness to serve. We are still waiting a response from Ms. Mohanty. It was moved by Dr. Seelman to SEND THE NAMES OF EUGENE BARTON AND VISWA P. MOHANTY TO THE MAYOR OF THE CITY OF PITTSBURGH AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF ALLEGHENY COUNTY REQUESTING THEIR APPOINTMENT TO THE TWO VACANCIES ON THE CITY OF PITTSBURGH / ALLEGHNEY COUNTY TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES. IF MS. MOHANTY IS UNABLE TO SERVE, THE NAME OF THE NEXT PERSON ON THE LIST WOULD BE SENT IN HER PLACE. Mr. Henderson seconded this motion. The motion was passed unanimously.

Employment:

Mr. Tague informed the Task Force that he would chair the committee. The focus would be employment with the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County. He is currently forming a committee. He spoke with Lisa Moses of the Mayor's office about meeting with Director Parees of the Department of Personnel and Civil Service. He has asked a number of representatives from employment groups to serve on the committee. Ms. Healy suggested that they look at who spoke at the public hearing on employment issues and invite them.

Dr. Seelman reminded the Task Force about the meeting on employment supported by Enable America. This meeting will occur before June 1st. She suggested that we get the issues the Task Force has on employment together. What is the role of the Task Force on this issue? Mr. Henderson asked if this meeting would just include agency representatives. Dr. Seelman said that no one has been invited yet. The coordinating committee will set the agenda. Mr. Tague should sit on the coordinating committee. Mr. Henderson asked if Stan should be invited from the Center. Mr. Tague said we do not control this process. He can suggest the Stan be included. Ms. Healey said the Focus Groups should have a strong representation of consumers, not just agencies. Dr. Seelman responded the Tina Calabro has been asked to provide names. Dr. Seelman will put forth Mr. Tague's name now.

Pittsburgh Housing Authority:

Mr. Keenan informed the Task Force that the Housing Authority was currently involved in two law suits or compliance reviews. One is being pursued by Mr. O'Hanlon and Three Rivers Council for Independent Living. HUD is also performing a compliance review. He said he would like the Task Force to help to review policies and design plans. Does the Task Force still have a Housing Committee? The Housing Authority is planning a lot of construction over the next few years to bring units into compliance. Mr. Henderson said they should get the accessibility design in the plans. It does not cost any more to plan for correct design.

Ms. Healy asked if the work to bring the units into compliance is retrofitting of existing units or new construction? Mr. Keenan responded some of both. Northview Heights, Garfield Heights and Addison Terrace are being demolished and rebuilt. They are still building some Hope Six units in Manchester. The Housing Authority has tried to make units more accessible in the past, but with limited success because the contractors and architects did not know what to do. He gave out his phone number (412-456-5020 X 123) and his email address (keenan@HACP.org).

Dr. Seelman said that a tool is being developed for remote assessment using ADAG. She felt this could interface with what the Housing Authority was doing. Mr. Keenan responded they were following UFAS (Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards) guidelines, which are more stringent than ADAG Guidelines. These guidelines are just for usage on Federal projects. Ms. Healey pointed out that there are new low income development projects, specifically in East Liberty and Oakhill, which can be made visitable very easily. Does the Housing Authority have any role to affect these projects? Mr. Keenan responded that they did not. Section 8 is exempt from Section 504. Private developers must follow UFAS as well. Ms. Healey pointed out the Mr. O'Hanlon is more knowledgeable on these issues. She asked how the Task Force would start a dialog. Mr. Keenan suggested we start with community builders. The Housing Authority has worked with them in Bedford and found them fairly receptive. He said they were anxious to get started. Mr. Henderson said he would get Dr. Seelman the information on the Regional HUD Coordination.

SEIU Presentation:

David Rosenblatt of SEIU Local 504 Direct Care Workers and Bertha Thompson, a mental health direct care worker for four years gave the presentation. The Right to Know legislation will let family members know about the use of the money. Mr. Rosenblatt said he had hard copies of the legislation. They then showed a Power Point presentation. There is not enough accountability on how providers spend public money. Workers are paid poverty wages, adding to the high turnover which hurts quality. Abuse and neglect cases are never exposed. From 1998 until 2002, Passavant Memorial Hospital overcharged the county by over billing the state. This money was used for unallowable expenses. The CEO received a salary of \$446,631 one year (his highest salary). The bill asks for annual net revenues and such items as profits, CEO salaries and transactions with related parties. Many workers declare bankruptcy to keep working. Over 50% of the direct care workers have less than three year experience. It takes one or two years to learn the job. The average wages are about \$20,000 a year and benefits are no longer provided. This results in a turnover of over 34% and a shrinking work force. Knowing about these characteristics will allow families and to make informed decisions. The proposed law requires information on annual turnover rate, vacancy rate, average raises and wages and benefits packages.

How does this affect consumers? High turnover rates create resident on resident abuse. The state collects incidents reports, but they are not available to the public. Only investigated incidents would be reported under the proposed law. Self determination requires consumers and family members be informed which is only available if summarized on a report card and accessible on the internet. They asked the Task Force to endorse this bill and speak at the public hearing.

Amanda Monroy of the Consumer Health Coalition said this information would help individuals advocate for their rights. This bill would help to create a quality system.

Doctor Seelman asked if the Consumer Health Coalition Board voted on this issue. Ms. Monroy sated it did not. The Disability Committee voted to support this legislation. Mr. Rosenblatt added the endorsement came from a series of conversations with Kate Robinson. He also spoke with Brenda Dare. Mr. Tague said they should have taken this issue to the board. Ms. Healey said we should address the merits of the proposal. The question of who speaks for the Consumer Health Coalition is an internal issue.

She went on to say that the provider community will probably not support this proposal. Should we hold off making a decision today and wait for input from more of the Task Force members? Ms. Carter said it was a good presentation. As a family member of two consumers of MH/MR services, she feels this is an issue we should strongly look at. We should share this information with other task force members and as a Task Force we should support this. Mr. Tague said he was uncomfortable with the lack of attendance. We should invite providers to the next meeting to discuss this issue.

Dr. Seelman said we should hear from the Department of Human Services, Mark Chernoff's office. We should speak out on this issue. What other consumer groups are supporting this legislation? Mr. Tague asked where does the Department of Human Services stand on this. Mr. Rosenblatt said they have supported the concept but have not decided about this particular legislation. It will be introduced tomorrow and referred to the Health and Human Services Committee for a hearing. Dr. Seelman asked what other consumer groups support the legislation. Mr. Rosenblatt said not many so far because most of the groups were waiting to see the legislation, which was just published. Most groups are moving slowly to take a position. Mr. Tague said the Task Force can not make a decision today. We should hear from those who oppose this legislation.

Dr. Seelman said the Task Force can make it known that this is a very important issue, both here and across the country. She supports the Task Force drafting a statement. Ms. Carter proposed that we add that this will continue to be an issue for the Task Force. We should hear from opponents and endorsers. Dr. Seelman reminded the members that the role of the Task Force is to advise the City and County. She moved to advise the County that **THE CITY OF PITTSBURGH / ALLEGHENY COUNTY TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES GOES ON RECORD THAT THE SALARIES AND WAGES OF DIRECT CARE WORKERS IN THE COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH / MENTAL RETARDATION SYSTEM IS A VITAL ISSUE TO THE HEALTH, SAFETY AND QUALITY OF LIFE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, OTHER PEOPLE WITH WHOM DIRECT CARE WORKERS SERVE AND THEIR FAMILIES.** Ms. Carter seconded the motion. Mr. Rosenblatt pointed out that the pending legislation does not address whether wages should be raised, only that the wage scale be available for public knowledge. The motion was passed unanimously.

Mr. Tague pointed out that this is just the first step. We will be looking into this issue further. Ms. Healey requested that the Task Force agree on a process to assure we can look into this issue further before the County Council votes. She suggested that we get the information to the members of the Task Force and either do an email vote or have a special meeting if County Council is going to vote before our next meeting. She said she would like a position to be taken before the public hearing. Public Hearings are announced a week in advance. Mr. Tague asked if a Public Hearing is called do the members want an Email vote or a special meeting.

Dr. Seelman said she would like to hear from the consumer community and the government. There is a basis for high salaries and collecting information on abuse incidents. This requires monitoring data, collecting and reporting. Does the County collect this data and if so, how? Mr. Rosenblatt responded there was a good amount of data collected, but very little reported. Dr. Seelman pointed out that there is an interesting parallel between what is going on in the Allegheny County Department of Human Services and with the Consumer Health Coalition policy makers. Mr. Meritzer suggested that he could read the statement to County Council. The public input would be Tuesday March 1, 2005, at 5:00 p.m.

Children's Issues:

Ms. Healey reported that there were no updates at this time. She had met with three staff people with the Department of Human Services to discuss the integrated process. At the hearing prior to the drafting of the annual plan there will be three minutes for each person to comment and there will be another comment period after the plan is drafted. She wants to work with Ms. Carter to get greater consumer input. State Director Richardson will send out planning directives to the Counties in April. We should start to solicit people to be involved now.

Transportation:

Mr. Tague reported the Governor is using Flex Highway dollars to assist transit systems. Of the 45 million dollars being used 19 million will go to Port Authority. This will delay any fare increase and service cuts. The effect on the Para transit system will be only the cost. This must be approved by SPC. No meeting of SPC has been scheduled. Ms. Healey pointed out that if service were to be cut for evenings and Sundays, they would cut Access as well. Mr. Tague responded that that cut was not scheduled until July (Phase 2). The advocates for public transit funding have done a great job and they are not going away until a permanent solution is found.

New Issues:

Ms. Healey reported that there was a budget briefing scheduled on Medicaid budget. There are cuts to the program in the Governor's budget. Families making over \$40,000 will be required to pay premiums. Adults will have a \$50,000 cap on durable medical supplies. This includes rental of equipment and disposable equipment. Ventilator rental cost \$5,000 a month. Recipients will be limited to two hospitalizations and 18 visits to medical professionals of any kind per year. There will be an increase in co-payments. She asked the Task Force to take a position on this issue. The Legislature will vote on this budget around June 30th. These cuts will have a tremendous negative impact on recipients. Dr. Seelman asked if Ms. Healey could send out the data. Mr. Tague pointed out that the philosophy of the Rendell administration is that everyone feels the pain of budget cuts. In Medicaid groups are affected. Some states are just eliminating groups of people. Who should comments be directed to? Ms. Healey responded that in each house of the legislature the Health and Welfare Committees will be hold hearing next week. People should communicate with the members of the local delegation to each house and to the leadership of the Legislature. Dr. Seelman suggested that we advise the Mayor and the County Executive. Mr. Tague said interested parties could call the members' offices. Ms. Healey suggested that people feed committee members from the County delegation questions. Mr. Tague pointed out we can do this as individuals. Ms. Healey added that after the briefing, the CHC is holding a strategy session. From this we can identify questions.

Dr. Seelman reported on WEA Plus. She wants to block consolidating the money into a block grant. She will send the information to Mr. Meritzer for distribution.

Announcements:

Mr. Tague informed the Task Force members that the Office of Vocation Rehabilitation is holding a Public Hearing April 4th from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Public Comment:

Rob Kohlmeyer stated that Allegheny County Medical Assistance will reimburse consumers for transportation. Consumers should get a letter on letter head stationary regarding their treatment needs. Mr. Tague pointed out there is a \$1.00 co-payment.

Adjournment:

It was moved by Ms. Healey to ADJOURN THE MEETING. Dr. Seelman seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 3:15 PM

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING:	DATE:	March 21, 2005
	TIME:	1:00 P.M.
	LOCATION:	First Floor Conference Room Civic Building, 200 Ross Street Pittsburgh, PA 15219