

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

June 16, 2003

MINUTES

Location: City Council Conference Room
City/County Building, 5th Floor
Pittsburgh, PA

Members Present: John Tague, Chairperson, Paul O'Hanlon, Co-chair, Jeff Parker, Treasurer, Ruth Walter Brenyo, Aurelia Carter, Bill Chrisner, Liz Healey, Penny Perlman, Kate Seelman

Members Absent: Milton Henderson, Al Condeluci, Linda Dickerson, Rich McGann

Others Present: Lisa Moses, Will Thompkins, Chuck Keenan, Judy Barricella, John McDowell, Jan Mather, Jerry Laycheck, Adi Flesher

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Tague at 1:10 PM.

Introductions:

All members and guests introduced themselves.

Presentation by County Executive:

Mr. Jim Roddey, Chief Executive of Allegheny County, was invited to address the Task Force on issues that are affecting people with disabilities in the County and to present his ideas on how to address those issues, with input from the Task Force.

Mr. Roddey began with a brief history of the County's initiatives through Disability Agenda 2000 and then addressed budget constraints that are affecting state and county programs that have historically served people with disabilities. He stated that the County Human Services budget will be cut by \$25 million in the upcoming year, including a near elimination of the Human Service Development Fund, due to the state budget deficit of \$2.5 billion. Mr. Roddey is hoping that some of these cuts will be restored by the state, but that it is still uncertain at this time whether or not they will.

In terms of specific programs, Mr. Roddey stated that County Mental Health programs that serve people in their own homes will be cut. These programs allow individuals to receive services at their home for an average yearly cost of less than \$3500 per person, rather than in an institution, where the average cost is \$30,000 per person. A similar cut will be imposed on drug and alcohol programs. Mr. Roddey believes that the end result of these cuts will be an increase in the institutionalized populations, both in nursing homes and prisons, where 92% of inmates are already there on drug and alcohol related offenses.

Mr. Roddey also explained the impacts of the proposed public transit cuts, noting that they will force people out of their jobs because they have no way to get to them. Further, he noted that

these cuts will impact people with disabilities even more dramatically, affecting their ability to get to needed medical appointments and social services.

Mr. Roddey noted that people with disabilities have not historically had a strong power base at the state level, especially in comparison to public interest lobbies like the National Rifle Association. He said that elected officials such as the Mayor and County Executive must be advocates for those who do not have power at the state level. Mr. Thompkins noted that people with disabilities need to enhance their power base so that they can affect change for their benefit. Mr. Roddey added that people with disabilities need a dedicated source of funds to cover programs that benefit their lives so that fluctuations in the state operating budget do not negatively impact them.

Ms. Healey noted that the City-County Task Force is creation of government and, as such, has some legitimate power and authority from those who created it. She also noted that it has been working to become a more powerful political force and has been able to mobilize significant numbers of people for the Visitability initiative. Dr. Seelman noted that the Task Force is currently in the midst of a strategic planning process where it hopes to find means to work more closely with those in decision-making positions at the City and County governments.

Mr. Roddey then announced that he is in the process of creating an Office of People with Disabilities at the County and that he believes the state will soon create a similar office within the Department of Community and Economic Development.

Mr. Roddey also discussed some ideas he had for ways in which the City-County Task Force could enhance its power base. He felt that the Task Force should approach private companies that have had a history of employing people with disabilities in the region and ask them to advocate for people with disabilities in Harrisburg. He noted that the heads of these corporations are listened to by people in government and that, by combining forces with them, the Task Force will greatly increase its ability to influence decision-makers. Mr. Roddey offered to convene a meeting between the CEO's of these corporations and members of the Task Force. Mr. Thompkins noted that the Task Force should also approach foundations for monetary support in some of its efforts. Mr. Roddey felt that the corporate community would be a better avenue, given that a partnership with members there would be more permanent than a foundation, which typically gives money for short-term projects. Finally, Mr. Roddey noted that Task Force members should look to other agencies like it to see if there is a possibility to merge, holding that corporations and foundations like to fund such innovative and cost saving approaches.

Mr. Roddey announced that the County is in the process of designing a new Human Services building on the current site of the jail annex. He informed members that, currently, the Department of Human Services is scattered throughout many offices downtown and regional satellite offices in county neighborhoods. The new building would allow DHS to consolidate these services into a single downtown facility, including those proposed through the new Office of Disabilities. He noted that he hopes to have this Office of Disabilities operational by September 2003.

Mr. O'Hanlon informed Mr. Roddey of the Visitability Ordinance effort at the City and asked if the County would also consider an ordinance if it were passed in Pittsburgh. Mr. Roddey said that he would have the County Law Department review the ordinance and, if they have no objections, see if a joint group of County Council members would sponsor it.

Mr. Roddey thanked the Task Force for allowing him to speak.

General Discussion:

Ms. Healey noted that Mr. Roddey seemed to indicate in his presentation at this meeting that there would be no budget for the Task Force for the upcoming year. Mr. Thompkins stated that the decision on Task Force funding has not yet been made.

Ms. Healey asked what the role of the Task Force would be in light of the creation of the new County Office of Disabilities. Dr. Seelman said that the County should still use the Task Force as an advisory board and that the County should still fund the Task Force. Moreover, she stated that the Task Force should have input into how DHS allocates its resources to serve people with disabilities. Mr. Chrisner added that the City and County already have in place a joint agreement for staffing and funding the Task Force and that it also has a mission to advise those local governments. He noted that he is worried that the Task Force may become irrelevant if it loses its funding.

The committee asked Mr. Parker to come up with a “bare bones” budget if the County decides to cease funding the Task Force. Mr. Parker stated that the Task Force could probably continue to operate in its current state with \$5000, with a breakdown of \$1000 for interpreters, \$1000 for travel, \$2000 for fiscal agent, and \$1000 for activities. If the Task Force simply wanted to hold meetings each month, he estimated that this could be done for about \$500 per year.

The Task Force explored other funding options, with Mr. O’Hanlon suggesting that it look to the Developmental Disabilities Council for funds under their collective advocacy projects. Dr. Seelman seemed to think that private foundations would not fund a public body like the Task Force. She added that the County should at a minimum try to provide the Task Force with \$10,000 this budget year so that it can continue its mission. In addition, Dr. Seelman felt that the Task Force should have input into the creation of the County Office of Disabilities and what it would eventually be charged with doing. Mr. Thompkins suggested that the Task Force send a letter to Mr. Roddey outlining these requests.

Dr. Seelman moved that Mr. Keenan draft a letter from the Task Force to Mr. Roddey stating that the mission of the Task Force is to advise the county on issues affecting people with disabilities and to ask that he solicit its advice in the creation of the Office of Disabilities. Ms. Healey seconded the motion. All members voted in favor of the motion.

Announcements:

Ms. Barricella announced that she is scheduling a meeting with the Allegheny Conference to discuss employment and other issues affecting people with disabilities in the region and that she would let the Task Force know when that meeting is to occur.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 PM. Members were invited to attend a presentation by Tom Murphy, Mayor, City of Pittsburgh, on the City’s present tax structure, budget, and plans for future revenue sources.

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING:

DATE: July 21, 2003
TIME: 1:00 P.M.
LOCATION: First Floor Conference Room
Civic Building, 200 Ross Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

FUTURE MEETING DATES:

August 18, 2003
September 15, 2003
October 20, 2003
November 17, 2003
December 15, 2003