

CITY OF PITTSBURGH/ALLEGHENY COUNTY
TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES

May 16, 2005

MINUTES

Location: First Floor Conference Room
Civic Building, 200 Ross Street
Pittsburgh, PA

Members Present: John Tague, Chairperson, Paul O'Hanlon, Co-chair, Eugene Barton, Aurelia Carter, Liz Healey, Milton Henderson, Rich McGann, Viswa P. Mohanty, Jeff Parker, Katherine D. Seelman

Members Absent: Ruth Walter Brenyo, Linda Dickerson, Penny Perlman

Others Present: Amy Anderson, Judy Barricella, Darlene Barton, Cynthia Berger, Brenda Dare, Joe Elliot, Chuck Keenan, Jerry Laychak, Amanda Lapina, Arnette F. McCoy, Richard Meritzer, Lisa Moses, Dana Washington

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Tague at 1:00 PM.

Approval of the agenda:

Hearing no changes the Chair ruled that the agenda was approved as submitted.

Introductions:

All members and guests introduced themselves.

Approval of April 18, 2005 Minutes:

Hearing no changes the Chair ruled that the minutes were approved as submitted.

Financial Report

Mr. Parker reported that we purchased a ticket for the Linda Dickerson Women with Disabilities Dinner. We have not received a bill for the interpreters because the County has been paying for, them. This will be reflected in the next fiscal report. He brought up the contract with Working Order for \$75.00 a month to maintain our email and mailing list. Ms. Healy reminded the members that Tony Buba was to do a follow-up video to small steps for us. We are getting close to the end of the year. How does the Task Force encumber the money? Mr. Parker responded that he would need to bill us for the work.

Office of People with Disabilities:

Evelyn Stypula explained that House Bill #1859 which first proposed this office died in the Senate. It was reintroduced as House Bill #1479. It is currently in the Health and Human Services Committee. It will create a research, resource and referral center. It will connect the Community with the legislature, boards and agencies. They would like the office to be housed in the Governor's Office. They are also working on getting an Executive Order to create the office. She then asked for letters of support for house Bill #1479.

Mr. Henderson asked how this office would differ from the office that currently exists in the Department of Public Welfare (DPW). Ms. Stypula responded that the DPW office is just for services. This office would provide advocacy. They would function independently. Mr. Barton asked what the budget for the office was. He added that this was tried once before but did not succeed because it was a duplication of services. Ms. Stypula said the budget for the offices was \$225,000. She also said that this office would not be a duplication of services. Instead they would hope that this office would defragment services and eliminate duplication. Mr. McGann asked if the current office was in the Department of Public Works. Ms. Stypula said the office of Disability Services is to be started by Secretary Richardson.

Ms. Healy suggested that the primary need for this office would be to do policy work in different departments and agencies in the state government. Advocacy in this office would not work because of the tight control the Governor has over the staff in his office. Both Presidents Bush and Clinton had policy advisors. She supports part of the initiative. Ms. Stypula responded that people wanted an office where they could go to get information. New York has an office like that, but it also provides services. This office would support people with disabilities, answer to people with disabilities and speak for people with disabilities. Ms. Healy added that a selling point would be to use this office to mobilize the disability community as a voting block. Ms. Stypula continued the office would bring all people with disabilities together on an agenda. It would be able to consult with the community about legislation. It would also let people know about their rights.

Mr. Parker said it would become an office of advocacy because Secretary Richardson created her office. It needs a new name. Its primary purpose would be to have the Governor's ear on disability issues. Dr. Seelman asked if this office would be a system change in the scope of government. The position in the White House is a political position. Could this office be an ombudsman for people with disabilities? Would it relate concern's about the disability community to other government offices?

Mr. Tague interjected that the Task Force may need a discussion about the letter. Ms. Healy added talking about membership to the office is confusing. We are not ready to vote on this today. Ms. Stypula said that the name of the Office will be the Office for People With Disabilities. The membership is of the community, not the office. Dr. Seelman asked what the timeline was. Ms Stypula said she wanted to use the time wisely. They are trying to get it out of committee as soon as possible. They are bringing other groups and people in. Ms. Healy asked who on the Task Force wanted to work on this. Dr. Seelman said she would review the draft. Mr. Barton and Mr. O'Hanlon said they wanted to work on this.

Update on WPIC ISC Closure:

Ms. Healy reminded the Task Force that Don Clark, Deputy Director of the Department of Human Services for Allegheny County had come to the last meeting because UPMC had taken over for Saint Frances Hospital when it had closed. UPMC could not continue to provide both client services and support coordination. They had to choose and decided to end the support coordination function. It was the largest of the four providers.

In response to the concerns express by the Task Force at the last meeting we have received a letter. Ms. Healy said she was very satisfied with the response. They extended the deadline to respond and added more opportunities to get information. Case loads would stay the same. And they will honor requests by clients for follow the clients support coordinator.

Ms. Carter and Ms. Healy expressed concerns about the Integrated Service Plan. Last year was the first year for this process. This year there is a schedule of meetings. But this is happening very quickly. We want families to be involved in the process. We want an ongoing role in planning services. The Integrated Service Plan must be in Harrisburg in July. Families are experiencing incredible fragmentation. There is great potential. It was suggested that we spread the word through the Email list. It is hoped that families have as much weight as providers.

Judy Barricella asked if they allow written comments. Ms. Healy said she never received any notification so she does not know. Ms. Barricella suggested we send a letter to Mark Chernoff requesting that the process be open. Ms. Healy responded that last year the notification was not any better. She met with Joe Camillus and Brenda Bokowski to ask for better notification this year, but she never heard anything back. Mr. O'Hanlon asked if this was a yearly process. Sometimes when public bodies don't have an adequate public participation process, it helps for other to do it. Ms Healy asked if there was a motion. Mr. O'Hanlon moved THE CITY OF PITTSBURGH / ALLEGHENY COUNTY TASK FORCE SET UP A PARENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE. Mr. Henderson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Dr. Seelman said that if it is appropriate, we should recognize that we appreciate the work of MR. Clark.

Disability Connections:

Ms. Barricella reported that the Aging and Disability Resource Center is still on hold. Another collaborators meeting is scheduled for this Thursday. At the first meeting they set up three committees; intake, structure, and information and referral. She went to Harrisburg and looked at a call center they had. The Harrisburg people will come to Pittsburgh to do a presentation. Everything is moving along. The Center will be located at 1 Smithfield Street.

Ms. Barricella further reported that Kennywood will no longer have a general admission price. This means children with disabilities and senior who don't go on the rides would pay more. They have a special office set up to where they will assess your situation and determine what rides you can go on and charge you based on this assessment. Previously you needed a permission slip to go on rides. Ms. Barricella asked the support of the Task Force in changing this situation.

Dr. Seelman asked what the range of options was. Could we ask them to come to a Task Force meeting? Mr. Henderson pointed out that many groups go to Kennywood. We should inform them of this change. Ms. Healy suggested we invite the administration of Kennywood to come to a meeting and invite the media. Mr. Barton asked if this requires a motion. Mr. Tague said that one is not required, but he would like a motion. Dr. Seelman asked if there were Americans with Disability Act guidelines. Mr. O'Hanlon responded there were, but they don't speak to price differential.

Chuck Keenan pointed out this is similar to the situation with Airlines. Mr. Henderson said he was evaluated, but he had to pay the same amount anyway. Ms. Barricella said there were two issues here, price and process. The new policy is intrusive and insulting. Ms. Healy moved WE INVITE A REPRESENTATIVE FROM KENNYWOOD TO THE NEXT MEETING TO DISCUSS THE POLICY OF EVALUATION AND THE FEE STRUCTURE. Seconded by Mr. Henderson. Mr. Parker asked if we wanted them at the annual meeting in June. He suggested we should have them come in July. Mr. Tague said we could set up a special meeting. It was decided that they should come to the July meeting. The motion was passed unanimously. Dr. Seelman asked that she get feedback on the legality of this.

Ms. Barricella went on to report that the City of McKeesport is discriminating against a consumer. She was informed that the Disability Law Project could help her because this was an individual issue. The Consumer is an elderly woman with a handicapped parking sign. Two police officers told her she would lose it because she has a driveway. A new store on the street needed a parking space. People going to the store are blocking her driveway and when she calls the police they will not come.

Dr. Seelman asked how this is routinely handled. Mr. O'Hanlon responded usually one applies for a space and you get it or you don't. To take it away is a taking issue. The State has a Human Relations Commission but the County does not. Dr. Seelman said the woman would need to keep a record of the times her driveway was blocked and the number of times she called the police. What happens when the police do not provide enforcement? Mr. McGann asked who is actually responsible for providing the space. Mr. Tague responded the City of McKeesport. Mr. McGann asked how it gets put there. Mr. Meritzer explained that you apply to the City and they investigate if it can be done. State law gives municipalities the power to put in handicapped parking, but they are not required to provide it. Mr. Tague asked Ms. Barricella to email him and he would formulate a recommendation.

SSA Hearing Office Relocation:

Mr. Tague introduced Cindy Berger, a lawyer who specializes in getting people Social Security. She said the Pittsburgh was on the 5th Floor of the Federal Home Loan Bank Building on Grant Street. The office was split into two sections. One section is in Cranberry Township. The other is on the 23rd Floor of the Federal Building. She wrote to Senator Santorum expressing her concerns. She is concerned about evacuation of the building. They are renovating the building from the top down. This includes asbestos removal. There is also an issue of dropping off claimants. Some claimants are claustrophobic. There is only one rest room for all clients and lawyers. The response from the Social Security Administration is they do not have any requirements regarding the height of the office.

Dr. Seelman stated that accessibility to rest rooms is important. Is the office close to public transportation? Mr. Barton asked about Cranberry. Ms. Berger said the Cranberry site was not selected yet. The guidelines are not very demanding. Mr. Barton also expressed his concern regarding public transportation to the office in Cranberry. Mr. Tague said rest rooms are an issue. Dr. Seelman said it should conform to Americans for Disability Act. Mr. Tague said he and Lisa Moses had talked with them. Mr. Meritzer is the ADA Compliance Officer. Ms. Moses said she reviewed the situation with Bob Kennedy and concluded this matter is beyond our purview. The Federal Government does not have to comply with local law. The City is currently looking at an All hazard Plan in relationship with the Federal Building. Dr. Seelman asked what agencies are involved. Ms. Berger replied just the Social Security Administration. Ms Healy said we have limited authority. We could express our concerns to the agency like we did with FEMA. We should send a letter to the Federal Building manager and the General Services Administration. We could contact OSER. Dr. Seelman asked who has Federal jurisdiction for 504. Mr. Keenan said it requires reasonable accommodation. They can meet with someone on the first floor in a common room. As for restrooms they can look at the program as a whole.

Mr. Tague pointed out that Ms. Healy has suggested a letter copied to the appropriate people. Dr. Seelman requested that Ms. Berger get us content for the letter. Mr. Tague said he would work with Ms. Berger on the letter. Mr. McGann asked who was on the first floor. Mr. Tague did not know the answer. Dr. Seelman asked that they include our concerns regarding transportation to the Cranberry Office. Mr. McGann asked if there were any other disability offices. There is an office for blind clients in the basement of the Kossman Building. We should research where these offices are.

Voting Update:

Ms. Healy said we have 15 minutes left and a number of items to cover. Mr. Tague said we can not do anything on Voting Access because Shawn Fox is not here. Ms. Healy said she went to the County Chief Executive's office to discuss this issue with Shawn Fox and was told he was not there, even though she saw him. Mr. O'Hanlon said all the Federal money was being used to buy voting machines and not for making polling places accessible. The Director of Elections is the person most responsible for this. The concern is that he does not set policy. Policy is set by the Election Board consisting of Chief Executive Onorato, Council member DeFazio and Council member Fawcett.

Dr. Seelman said that this problem is occurring all over the state. Mr. O'Hanlon said 1/3 of the counties have some inaccessible polling place and 1/3 have a lot of inaccessible polling places. We have the second largest number of inaccessible polling places. Mr. Tague suggested that the committee bring back a recommendation on strategies. Mr. O'Hanlon said we need to bring Mark Wolosik to the July meeting. We need to hold his feet to the fire. Mr. Onorato asked if they could use Provisional Ballots in lieu of accessible polling places. Mr. McGann asked how we get Provisional Ballots on Braille and interpreters at polling places. Mr. Tague said the Committee should meet and give a recommendation. Mr. O'Hanlon said Mr. Wolosik is the responsible entity and he should be invited to the July meeting.

Annual Meeting:

Mr. Parker said it will be held in the Simmon's Room of the United Way Building. Ms. Healy suggested the speaker do a presentation on Medical Assistance cuts, explaining the cuts and how people can contact their legislators. Bob Nelson could do an advocacy presentation. She added last year there was a web site on irregularities. She would like to do a presentation this year if we have the documentation to mobilize people to action.

Dr. Seelman suggested a panel including Mark Wolosik and a power point presentation on inaccessibility. Also Mr. McGann could speak on deaf issues. This makes sense because we could influence this issue. We want to put pressure on Mr. Wolosik, but not bludgeon him. Ms. Healy added that Mr. O'Hanlon has had creative solutions in the past like the competition to find accessible polling places. Dr. Seelman said this issue includes concerns for blind and deaf voters.

Mr. Tague said we are more prepared to have a program on Medicare Cuts. Mr. O'Hanlon agreed we could have that program. Mr. Tague said we could use panel members. Mr. O'Hanlon said we could invite County Executive Onorato on voting accessibility and he can decide if Mr. Wolosik should come. We could invite the election board as well. Mr. Barton and Mr. O'Hanlon could serve. Dr. Seelman and Mr. Mohanty will find someone to round out the panel.

Enable America:

Dr. Seelman reported that the Town Meeting will be May 24th. She is going to get the names of the people attending and add them to the Task Force data base. Mr. Tague said he will ask to set up a process to accomplish that. He requested that there be a table and microphone there for public input.

Housing:

Mr. Henderson reported on the Housing Forum he attended in King of Prussia. Tandif money is being moved to PHFA. There will be a hearing in Mars, PA, Thursday May 19th. Philadelphia has 10% of its housing stock accessible. He will find out when hearings are. He met with Chuck Keenan of the Pittsburgh Housing Authority. There are a number of renovations going on.

Public Comment:

Mr. Tague commented that so much is going on and the two hours goes so quickly. Dr. Seelman suggested that the meeting be reorganized around action items. Mr. Tague said he was open to suggestions.

Ms. Stypula said she would be happy to talk to anyone about the State Office and would come to another meeting to speak.

Brenda Dare said that in dealing with the Kennywood issue we have to be very clear that we want general admission reinstated. You can get a slip if you refuse to be evaluated.

Dana Washington expressed her appreciation for the meeting.

Ms. Healy pointed out there was an article stating the Task Force has endorsed the report card legislation

Adjournment:

It was moved by Dr. Seelman to ADJOURN THE MEETING. The meeting was adjourned at 3:10 PM

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING: DATE: June 20, 2005
TIME: 1:00 P.M.
LOCATION: First Floor Conference Room
Civic Building, 200 Ross Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15219