

**CITY OF PITTSBURGH/ALLEGHENY COUNTY
TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES
NOVEMBER 17, 2008
MINUTES**

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

Members Present: Paul O'Hanlon, Chairperson, Co-chair, Liz Healey, Milton Henderson, Sarah Goldstein, Rich McGann, James C. Noschese, Jeff Parker, John Tague

Members Absent: Katherine D. Seelman, Aurelia Carter, Linda Dickerson, Janet Evans

Others Present: Holly Dick, Victoria Campbell, Dianne Gallagher, Robert Gallagher, Larry Hockenberry, Linda Lee, Kevin Maxwell, Richard Meritzer, Charles Morrison, Teresa Nellans, Bill Newland, Terry Reynolds, Lucy Rooth, Tamara Siegert, Joseph Wassermann, Audrey Weiss

The meeting was called to order by Mr. O'Hanlon at 1:03 PM.

INTRODUCTIONS:

Everyone introduced themselves. Mr. O'Hanlon read the agenda.

FINANCIAL REPORT:

There was no Financial Report this month. The Treasurer said the only expenses were our routine expenses of about \$1,000.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS:

The October minutes were presented. Mr. Parker moved to ACCEPT THE OCTOBER MINUTES. Mr. Henderson seconded the motion. The motion was passed unanimously.

PERSONNEL CARE HOMES INCLUDING RAISING THE PERSONAL NEEDS ALLOWANCE

Mr. O'Hanlon reported the economic stimulus bill included a \$38 increase for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) which is twice the regular annual increase. All this money will go to the operators of personnel care homes from their residents. The residents only get to keep a \$68 allowance. The operators of personnel care homes just received an increase from the State. Advocates for the residents want to split the increase in the economic stimulus bill between the residents and operators. This is scheduled to occur in December. The advocates are asking Secretary of the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) Estelle Richman to issue a DPW bulletin increasing the resident's allowance by \$18.50. Do we want to support the increase and write a letter or sign on to a letter?

Mr. Tague moved TO SUPPORT THE INCREASE. Mr. Noschese seconded the motion. Mr. Noschese asked if this was a one time increase or an annual increase. Mr. O'Hanlon responded this was a one time increase. There is an annual cost of living increase. All that increase goes to the operators. This increase is larger and the operators did not expect it. Mr. Noschese said he would like to see an annual increase. For 15 years this money has been going to the operators. Mr. Tague pointed out that inflation has eaten away at the allowance. Now the residents need to pay for prescription drugs. It is critical for Secretary Richman to allow and allowance increase. Mr. Parker added when Rachael came to the Task Force we agreed to support this. Mr. O'Hanlon responded that was a bill in the legislature. This is a cost neutral move. Ms. Healy said there is no opposition to the motion. We need to discuss what else we can do in this small time frame. She called the question. Ms. Goldstein asked when Rachael came did she have a figure? Mr. O'Hanlon responded it was an increase of \$30, going from \$60 to \$90. Mr. Wassermann asked why the increase was \$18.50. Mr. O'Hanlon answered that is half of \$37. The motion passed unanimously.

Robert Gallagher ask how are the residents money managed. Mr. O'Hanlon responded that it varies depending on the capacity of the individual. It should be in people's pockets. Mr. McGann added it depends on who has Power of Attorney. Mr. O'Hanlon point out we have 30 days to have a Departmental Directive issued. Ms. Healy asked if anyone has met and talked with Director Richman about this. Mr. O'Hanlon responded people have sent communications to her and have not received anything in return. Ms. Healy pointed out the Children's Commission meets on Thursday and Director Richman chairs that. She will try to pin Director Richman down for a meeting. Mr. Tague added he brought it up at the Governor's Advisory Committee with her. She said she would take it under advisement. There was no motion made at the Advisory Committee. Victoria Campbell said there are two groups working on this. We should get everyone to flood the Governor's office with phone calls about this.

THE STATUS OF TRANSPORTATION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES VIS-À-VIS THE POSSIBLE WORK STOPPAGE OF PORT AUTHORITY IN DECEMBER

Mr. O'Hanlon reported that the work stoppage is scheduled for December 1st. He had invited someone from County Executive Onorato's office. He suggested we move this to later on the agenda. He pointed out that Holly Dick from Access Transportation was here.

STAFF REPORT

Linda Lee updated the Task Force on the Hospital Compliance Project. She is putting together a PowerPoint for the next meeting. Mr. Noschese asked that he be sent a copy of the PowerPoint.

THE STATUS OF TRANSPORTATION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES VIS-À-VIS THE POSSIBLE WORK STOPPAGE OF PORT AUTHORITY IN DECEMBER

Mr. O'Hanlon reiterated at the last meeting there was discussion of a possible transit shutdown. Now it looks more possible. He invited Bob Stump from the County Executive Office and Holly Dick from Access.

Ms. Dick reported Access will continue to operate if there is a work stoppage. They will serve people who are currently recipients of services. They will also make an effort to serve recipients who utilize the services of Department of Human Services. They will need to make adjustments of ride times and scheduling times to meet the increased demand. At peak usage times they will need to prioritize trips. They are working with the Committee for Accessible Transportation to prioritize. Group shopping trips will be scheduled at off peak times. It will not be easy. They will make operational decisions as they go along. They are working with the Department of Human Service to see if they can use their vans. They will try to get the current drivers overtime.

Mr. Stump is the Senior Policy staff for the Department of Human Services (DHS). Karen Lemon, Assistant Director is working with vulnerable populations. She has done 3 things:

1. Arraign to get staff to their workstations. She did a survey to match those who can drive and those who need rides. They bulk of the work is done by providers.
2. Work with providers to plan to get staff to work and think through creative contingencies to get clients to services.
3. Talk with Karen Hoesch Director of Access.

They have five offices that provide services for different populations. All five offices have their own priorities. They are putting providers on notice.

Ms. Dick added one contingency plan will be to stagger the hours of the agencies. Mr. Parker said it's not just about getting consumers to programs, but getting programs to consumers. At United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) about 330 people get personal care attendants to their homes by bus. These are not people with disabilities, but people providing services to people with disabilities. Mr. O'Hanlon asked if we know how many are served in this way. Ms. Dick answered someone from UCP contacted them through Judy Barricella, but they have received no updates from other providers. Mr. Parker said UCP is offering their employees and additional \$10.00 an hour plus mileage to provide transportation. Besides the efforts undertaken by DHS is there any help we can get from the County to minimize disruption? Mr. Stump said that question was above his pay grade. A lot of people are weighing in on options. Mr. Parker said funding is an issue. Paying employees and extra \$10 an hour can only last so long. Mr. Stump added the contingency plans go from short term to panic. CYS is O. K. because most of the workers drive. Some may do less work face to face and more on the telephone or shared cases. They are talking about partnering with other agencies. Parking is going to be an enormous problem.

Mr. McGann said people with disabilities are not respected. There are lots of communication issues. If a cab is late people who are deaf or deafblind have no way of knowing that. No driver can use sign language. Why not hire people who can sign. Ms. Dick pointed out they must screen drivers and adding another requirement would be difficult.

Mr. Noschese pointed out that a lot of people who are deaf can not use Access and do not have the money for a car. Can you ask a judge to hand down a court order to keep Port Authority running? Mr. Stump said the County does not have standing to do that. Mr. O'Hanlon added people who are deaf with mental illness are not Access eligible. Mr. Stump said they will deal with emergencies as priorities. This is driven by medical issues. Ms. Dick added that Dialysis Centers among others are looking at other transportation options. Access will work with DHS. Mr. McGann asked what about an emergency. Ms. Dick responded they need to call 911.

Mr. O'Hanlon asked what the capacity of Access is. Ms. Dick said it varies daily. Mr. O'Hanlon pointed out there are many conditional riders who use fixed route systems who will need to use Access during a work stoppage. He will be one. He asked since he is going to work will he get a priority ride? Ms. Dick said that is not settled. Mr. O'Hanlon added everyone will have to do their best. In two weeks will a system be set up or will it be a disaster? How many contingency riders will Access be able to handle? Ms. Dick responded that no priority riders will suffer. As of yet there are no specifics. Mr. O'Hanlon asked how long Access has funding for a higher service level. Ms. Dick responded Port Authority has assured us they will support us.

Mr. McGann said in other cities if bus service ceases they can have special waivers at night. Ms. Dick responded Access operates until midnight. There are no plans to operate after midnight. In other cities Para-transit services only the disability community and only when buses operate. Access can operate longer hours.

Mr. Tague said his understanding is that Port Authority will be imposing a contract. While the union has no stomach to go on strike, if that happens they will go on strike. Mr. O'Hanlon added if Port Authority imposes a contract and the drivers refuse to show up for work it's a lockout and the drivers get unemployment compensation. Mr. Tague suggested that someone will go to court as Mayor Masloff did 16 years ago. Is there some action the Task Force can take?

Mr. O'Hanlon then asked if there were any more questions for Ms. Dick or Mr. Stump. Ms. Dick said she brought a press release from Port Authority. She also brought a number of SPC Van Pooling program brochures. Mr. Henderson asked what percentage of Port Authority Riders qualify for Access. Mr. Stump said regardless of the percentage we need to make contingency plans. Mr. McGann pointed out that that Access staff have attitude issues. Mr. Henderson continued we should set up communication with the Disability Rights Network. People should be calling them. Mr. O'Hanlon asked in terms of passing information to the public? Mr. Henderson responded yes.*****

DISCUSSION ABOUT PORT AUTHORITY

Mr. O'Hanlon reported Public Transit is in crisis. The Union is working under a contract that expired June 30th. The County is withholding tax revenues to try to get a new contract. Non-negotiable items are changes in retirement and lifetime healthcare programs. If a compromise is not reached by December Port Authority will shut down. We have no information about Access.

Holly Dick further reported Access operates independently and can continue to operate. They will do their best to meet people's needs. They will try to serve people with disabilities who do not qualify for the service. They will set priority for trips (work, medical appointments, daycare). They will also arraign pre-scheduled food market trips in off peak hours.

Mr. Parker added what we were preparing for was a bus drivers' strike. But if the system shuts down due to lack of money that will affect Access differently. Ms. Dick pointed out the Lottery money would still be coming to the program. Mr. Henderson added there is State money coming as well. Mr. O'Hanlon responded the State money requires a local match. Ms. Dick added if the

local match is withheld, the State money will not be provided. Mr. Wassermann clarified that the local match does not affect the lottery money. Mr. Henderson asked how much State money is available. Mr. O'Hanlon said \$280 million.

Mr. O'Hanlon asked do you have sense of how Access can absorb eligible bus riders. Ms. Dick replied they did not know how many people we are talking about. Mr. McGann pointed out that we have had town hall meetings previously with County Executive Onorato. He should be part of this discussion. Mr. O'Hanlon asked who we should invite to the November meeting. He doesn't see how Access could continue for riders under 65 years of age. Mr. Noschese said this labor issue between Port Authority and the County has nothing to do with us. We should not be involved. Dr. Seelman countered we have a responsibility to maintain transportation for our constituencies. School systems have small transportation systems that are unused during off-peak hours. We should strategize about November.

Mr. Henderson said the bigger picture is the State money. We should be working with the Governor to keep the money flowing. Mr. Parker added we support public transportation and the County provides it. We supported the drink tax. It is being collected but not being used. In the past the State continued the flow of funds until the County provided the match. This time the County is saying there will be no match. We need to take a position. We want funding to continue. The County Executive has met with us in the past. Mr. Henderson said the money is there. The State has the money and the State should keep the money flowing. Mr. O'Hanlon responded this is an artificial crisis being created. The state has been asked to keep out. Ms. Goldstein summarized that money has been earmarked for a Port Authority match. The County has excess money. They are withholding the money.

Mr. McGann said we have met with County Executive Onorato two times and have never heard the outcomes of those meetings. We need to prepare so we can get concrete answers. Access is very important. County Executive Onorato should be at the next meeting. Mr. Noschese moved THE CITY OF PITTSBURGH / ALLEGHENY COUNTY TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES SEND A LETTER TO COUNTY EXECUTIVE ONORATO STATING THAT BUS SERVICE SHOULD CONTINUE DURING THE STRIKE FOR HEALTH REASONS. Mr. O'Hanlon said there is no strike. Dr. Seelman said upon the occasion of the strike what is the emergency plan. Who can give us the best answer from the County? This will make people with disabilities prisoners should this occur. We can do a number of things. Ms. Evans agreed with Mr. Henderson. The money should be provided. We have not heard from people who use Access to go to church and other activities. What about people who use Access for shopping. Ms. Dick responded Access is preparing for this. Ms. Evans agreed the Task Force should meet with County Executive Onorato. Mr. Parker said people with disabilities use the bus. Mr. O'Hanlon asked should we invite him to the next meeting or have a separate meeting. Should we invite Karen Hoesch to the next meeting? Mr. Henderson responded if County Executive Onorato schedule is filled we should meet with him when we can. Dr. Seelman moved THE CITY OF PITTSBURGH / ALLEGHENY COUNTY TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES CONTACT COUNTY EXECUTIVE ONORATO FOR AN APPOINTMENT AND ASK SOMEONE FROM HIS OFFICE TO COME TO THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING. Mr. Henderson seconded the motion. Mr. Parker added Karen Hoesch should also be on the agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

STAFF REPORTS

Mr. Meritzer reported he had set up two meetings. The Visitability Marketing Committee meeting has been set for November 12th. And he has worked with the Center for Hearing and Deaf Services to have the Deaf, Deafblind and Hard of Hearing Workshop for November 15th.

Dr. Seelman asked about the cost for the workshop. Mr. Meritzer said as far as he knows there are no expenses. The Center for Hearing and Deaf Services is donating the space and the interpreters and everyone will bring or pay for their own lunch. Dianne Gallagher confirmed that Ken Puckett will provide the captioning services. Ms. Nellans pointed out that was the date of the next meeting of the Hearing Loss Association. There was discussion regarding the focus of the workshop, which would be the Convention Center and the Airport. Mr. McGann suggested this be put on hold until after the 15th. Mr. Parker said we have responsibilities for Authorities. We can focus our concerns on the Convention Center and Airport Authority.

[Note, based on the conflict noted above, this workshop was postponed to a later date.]

TASK FORCE UPDATES

Mr. O'Hanlon reminded the members that we still have not had our Annual Meeting for this year. There was consensus to put this on hold.

VOX POP

Dr. Seelman reminded everybody about the Thornburgh Family Lecture Series on October 30th at 1:00 p.m. The speaker is I. King Jordan who is a great civil rights leader.

Dr. Seelman Thanked everyone connected to the new brochure, particularly Ms. Healy.

Mr. Seelman moved the meeting to be adjourned. Mr. Evans seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 2:55 P.M.

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING:

DATE: November 17, 2008
TIME: 1:00 P.M.
LOCATION: Large Conference Room
200 Ross Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15219