

**HEALTH, SOCIAL, EDUCATIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE
MEETING
HELD VIA AUDIO WEBINAR
PURSUANT TO TEMPORARY EMERGENCY ORDERS**

Chairwoman Sayegh, Legislators Addonizio & Nacerino

Tuesday

March 16, 2021

(Immediately following the Economic Development Meeting at 6PM)

The meeting was called to order via audio webinar at 6:51 P.M. by Chairwoman Sayegh who led in the Pledge of Allegiance. Upon roll call Committee Members Addonizio, Nacerino, and Chairwoman Sayegh were present.

Item #3 - Update/COVID-19 Vaccinations/Health Department

Chairwoman Sayegh stated unfortunately there was not a representative from the County Health Department who could participate in this meeting. She read a brief memorandum that was sent to her in response to her memorandum dated May 10, 2021, requesting a member of the County Health Department please apprise the Committee of the progress of the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines. Memorandum from County Executive Odell to Chairwoman Sayegh Dated March 16, 2021: *"I am in receipt of your memo dated March 10, 2021 in reference to March Health Meeting. Dr. Michael Nesheiwat or a representative are unavailable to attend this evening's meeting. The Health Department is working very hard setting up PODS, contract tracing on top of all other Health Department business. I have attached a memo from Kathleen Percacciolo of the Health Department with the progress of distribution. Thank you"*. She continued to read from the attached document referenced in the memorandum: To date, March 16, 2021: 4,672 1st doses of the vaccination have been administered, 2,141 2nd doses have been administered, totaling 6,814 vaccines that have been administered. Per the NYS DOH Vaccine Tracker, there have been 25,142 Putnam County residents who have received their 1st dose of the vaccine. She stated 12,388 Putnam residents are fully vaccinated. There were 998 COVID positive cases in February, down from 2,527 COVID positive cases in January. She complimented the members of the Putnam County Health Department for all their hard work during this pandemic. She stated they have been working non-stop and continue to do so as the next portion of this Pandemic rolls out. She stated each day more populations are added to the vaccine eligibility list. She stated it is her understanding that the County Health Department is eligible to administer vaccines to the eligible groups. She recommended people check the Putnam County website for current updates. She stated the County website is updated as new updates and information come to the County from the State of New York.

Legislator Montgomery stated she would like to ask some questions related to the COVID-19 Vaccination and Health Department report.

Chairwoman Sayegh stated she will open the discussion up to the Committee members first and then to the rest of the Legislators.

Legislator Addonizio explained there is a weekly Supervisor call that she is on as Chair of the Legislature. She explained updates on the Vaccines, POD scheduling, NYS Department of Health Testing, and Schools, etc. are provided on the call. She stated she provides a synopsis of the calls to the Legislators via email. She expressed her appreciation to Commissioner of Health Dr. Nesheiwat, Supervising Public Health Nurse Kathleen Percacciolo and Public Health Nurse Shanna Seigel for all their hard work during the handling of this pandemic.

Legislator Montgomery stated she has requested every month, since COVID started, to have a representative from the County's Health Department participate in the Health Committee meetings to provide the Legislators with an update. She explained she appreciates the memo updates the Legislators now receive from Chairwoman Addonizio and appreciates Legislator Sayegh's update here at this committee meeting. She explained neither Legislator represents her constituents. She stated she has requested to be on the weekly calls so she could receive the updates and ask questions on behalf of her constituents. She stated her constituents do not appreciate having to dig through the Putnam County website for information or being told to go to the New York State website. She stated as their County Representative they want to receive the information from her. She stated since the beginning of the crisis she has requested the opportunity to participate, but she has not been granted the opportunity. She stated at the very least, she believes the County Health Department should be presenting an update on the current status of the pandemic to the Legislature on a monthly basis, until this crisis is over, or allow her to participate on the weekly calls with the Supervisors and Mayors. She stated again her appreciation for the updates provided by both Chairwoman Sayegh and Chairwoman Addonizio.

Chairwoman Sayegh stated as Chair of this Committee she is not on the weekly update calls either. She stated the Legislature has a representative on the call, Legislature Chairwoman Addonizio. She stated Chairwoman Addonizio does provide an update after the calls, which provide a lot of detail. She stated also she believes the Administration and the Health Department are both very diligent in updating the public through press releases. She stated her constituency is also their constituency and she believes they are taking this very seriously and provide quite a bit of information.

Item #4 - Discussion/Reopening of Schools/Parents Perspective/Ms. Jamie Callanan

Chairwoman Sayegh stated in March of 2020, County Executive Odell issued a State of Emergency, marking the beginning of this pandemic. She stated the decision to close schools to help stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus in our schools and to protect the health and safety of our students, their families, and staff, with an understanding that the epicenter of this virus was in Westchester County. She explained surrounding counties issued a similar order. She stated the Putnam County Health Department has served as a resource in this matter since day one. She stated she helped them interpret guidance sent down from New York State. She continued to speak to this matter and its challenges and impact to the students, parents, families, and staff members of our schools throughout Putnam County. She stated the School Districts are planning to kick-off full-time learning in April 2021. She stated the 2020-2021 School Year began with a hybrid model in October 2020, after a rocky start due to the pandemic. She stated now many of the schools are set to reopen for full-time in person learning in April. She spoke to the challenges facing the School Districts in terms of their efforts to guard the health and safety of

their students, their families, and staff. She stated the Putnam County Health Department has weekly phone calls with the School Districts. She quoted sections of a press release, March 5, 2021, from County Executive Odell. She stated the Health Department's role has remained consistent, they interpret guidance, recommend mitigation, issue mandatory orders of isolation of infected individuals, identify contacts and issue associated orders of quarantine. She explained the Health Department does not develop the guidance or determine the adequacy of return to school plans. She stated the School Districts have the sole responsibility to prepare a plan that adheres to the State and CDC requirements and each plan must be submitted to the New York State Education Department for approval. She understands parents have real concerns about the impact of distance learning and concerns regarding the reopening of the schools. She stated Legislator Castellano has requested this matter be on this agenda for a discussion from the parents' perspective of the reopening of the schools.

Legislator Castellano stated it has been a very long and strange year. He stated a number of local residents have reached out to him regarding the School Districts and their handling of the situation based on the guidance from the Health Department. He stated he agrees, one (1) year later the focus needs to be on getting the students back into the classroom. He stated Ms. Jamie Callanan is on the audio webinar this evening to speak to this matter.

Jamie Callanan, constituent, stated her appreciation to the Legislators for the opportunity to speak to them on behalf of the parents and guardians across Putnam County. She stated she has been a Brewster resident for most of her life. She stated currently she is living in Brewster raising her children. She expressed her recognition of the trials and tribulations that everyone has been faced with during this pandemic. She stated that she does not think the plight of parents with young children has been acknowledged or had enough action taken to make children a priority during this pandemic. She stated she too is disappointed that the Legislature's Health Committee Meeting does not have representation from the County's Health Department. She stated she finds it disheartening that they are not here to listen to the feedback from the constituents of Putnam County. She provided a brief list of some incidents that people were faced with during this challenging year. She spoke to the challenges of working parents, and children having to learn to navigate computer learning, and parents who were working from home while also helping their young children with the classes on Zoom, etc. She stated it was a completely new format to everyone. She stated unless you lived it, there is no way you can understand the stress and challenges. She stated due to quarantines, shortage of staff, holidays, superintendent's day, there was not enough days of school each month. She stated many parents are opting for full remote because of the inconsistency of the schedule and the risk of quarantine. She stated now, they have allowed sports to begin. She stated many of the students involved in sports are choosing online, because of the risk to have to quarantine. She expressed that the loss of instruction will have an impact on special needs students this year and for the next five years (5). She continued to speak to the impacts being seen to the students because of this current environment. She stated the infection rates in our New York State Schools have been below 1% for months now. She explained it is the opinion of she and many parents that there is not a focus on what the kids need. She stated that is why the parents have come together and are working to advocate on behalf of the children and their needs. She stated Assemblymen Kevin Byrne and Colin Schmitt are now helping fight this fight. She continued to speak to this matter. She stated the notice that the Health Department is only an advisor, was just released, after the parents

begged for clarity on what the Health Department's role was. She stated communications from the schools was that the Putnam Department of Health had informed them of what they could and could not do. She stated it is her opinion the authoritative tone from a governmental agency set us back months in the students return to school. She continued to speak to this matter. She stated in summary it is her wish and the wish of the parents she is working with, that Putnam County change the rules for our schools today. She stated the hope is that the Putnam schools will align with the schools in Dutchess and Westchester Counties. She continued to speak to the changes they would like to see, versus the proposed changes that are in place in the schools. She concluded with her appreciation for this opportunity to be heard.

Chairwoman Sayegh thanked Ms. Callanan and repeated the County's Health Department has weekly updates with the School Districts. She provided a few different locations that are available to everyone to gather additional information. She stated that the number of COVID-19 cases in a school are reported to and tracked by New York State, that information is not provided to the County's Health Department. She stated she relates to Ms. Callanan's passion, there is nothing more important than our children. She stated we have been faced with a task that has gone over and above what a parent should be doing and understands the frustration.

Legislator Addonizio stated she concurs with Chairwoman Sayegh. She stated we are all aware of the emotional and mental impact this is having on our students. She stated we are all in this and trying the best we can, but we need to adhere to the New York State Guidelines.

Legislator Nacerino stated she agrees with much of what has been said. She stated this has been such a challenge from so many different perspectives. She stated we all want the children back in school, but this has been a struggle. She stated she used to work in the Brewster Schools, and has stayed in communication with some of the teachers. She stated the teachers want what is best for the kids too and they want things to get back to normal. She stated this is a nationwide problem. She continued to speak to the many concerns that exist right now. She stated she empathizes with Ms. Callanan as a young mother with children in school and all the families. She stated parents are challenged with trying to work, keep a household, and keep their kids on top of their schoolwork. She stated the pandemic was unpredictable, unprecedented and everyone is working through this, the best they can. She stated the only thing we can rely on are the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) Guidelines. She stated she is glad to hear the schools will be open again in April, and the kids can get back to somewhat of a normal school life.

Chairwoman Sayegh read from a statement sent from the County's Department of Health regarding the updated parameters for quarantine.

Legislator Montgomery thanked Ms. Callanan for coming forward with her heartfelt information. She stated she is requesting, via this meeting tonight, that the Health Commissioner provide an update monthly at these Health Committee Meetings. She stated she cannot comprehend what Ms. Callanan and parents of young children are going through. She stated it is challenging with her 22-year-old who is home working on his thesis, and they are trying to navigate sharing web time. She stated not much has changed for her here in government. She stated she is still getting her paycheck while not even having to travel to the County Legislative Office for meetings. She

explained she does feel helpless when she thinks about people like Ms. Callanan. She stated the world has changed completely. She continued to speak to her frustration of not being given the tools to help people. She stated she believes every spare dime this County has should be set aside for mental health resources for our young people.

Ms. Callanan stated she appreciates that. She stated it is critically important that we recognize we have responsibilities that are within our County, and we did not address them, in her opinion. She stated the guidance coming out now, is because of the parents who have advocated for this. She stated the message she wants to make clear is, yes, it is a global, national problem, but let us not shirk our responsibly. She continued to speak to this matter.

Legislator Castellano thanked Ms. Callanan for bringing a lot of the concerns of parents to light. He stated they have spoken many times over the past ten (10) years. He stated the fact remains we have never seen our schools closed before, like this. He stated we are all trying to figure it out, trying our best, and he believes the County's Health Department had nothing but the best interest of our students, teachers, faculty, and the workers in mind. He stated we say it many times and hear it many times, but it is worth saying again, these are unprecedented times. He stated he is glad to hear the Brewster Schools will be reopening. He stated he hopes the other schools will follow. He expressed his appreciation again to Ms. Callanan and repeated that we are all doing the best we can, as we continue to learn as we move forward.

Legislator Jonke stated he would like to thank Ms. Callanan for all the work she has done on behalf of all our school age children. He stated he is a father to a young daughter with special needs. He stated she needs the routine as much, if not more, than all the students out there. He stated he believes Ms. Callanan's hard work has been effective and has moved the needle in Putnam County. He stated he will continue to support her efforts, as he and Legislator Castellano did at Ms. Callanan's recent rally.

Chairwoman Sayegh thanked Ms. Callanan stating it is always important to hear the perspectives of the parents.

Item #5 - Other Business - None

Item #6 - Adjournment

There being no further business at 7:31 P.M. Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to adjourn; Seconded by Legislator Nacerino. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Administrative Assistant Ed Gordon.