

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES
COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
APRIL 13, 2022**

This meeting was conducted by Zoom/Teleconference.

ATTENDANCE: Jorge Cruz, Co-chair; Aikeem Boyd, Co-chair; Michelle Lyons, Maria Pereira, Michele Small

OTHERS: Council Member(s): M. McBride-Lee & T. Mack; Thomas Gaudett, Mayor's Office; C. Bell, Recovery Network Programs; A. Feller, Chief Executive Officer, Southwest Connecticut Mental Health System; T. Papa, Director, Director, Youth Services, Lighthouse Program; C. Colon, South End Community Center; M. Testani, Superintendent of Schools; Barbara, iPhone-DNPH80W00DXT

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Cruz called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. A quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF COMMITTEE MINUTES

• **March 9, 2022 (Regular Meeting).**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER PEREIRA MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE MARCH 9, 2022 REGULAR MEETING.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER SMALL SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Informational Session with Michael Testani, Superintendent of Schools; Alicia Feller, Chief Executive Officer, Southwest Connecticut Mental Health System; Cheryl Bell, Recovery Network of Program; Carmen Colon, Alpha Community Services/YMCA regarding homelessness and education in the city.

Ms. Feller greeted the Committee and said that she was the Chief Executive Officer for the Southwest Connecticut Mental Health System. Their offices are in Bridgeport but they serve from Stratford to Greenwich. She then gave a brief overview of the kinds of services that are available, such as Young Adult Services. There are two residential sites in Bridgeport that help individuals transition into their own independent apartments. There is also a mobile crisis team that now has expanded hours. There is a community support services on Fairfield Avenue. The small housing department has subsidized housing certificates and a homeless outreach team. They work with Alpha Community Services and the Recovery Network Programs.

They are looking to expand their homeless outreach and will be working with the local police departments regarding collaboration for providing mental health specialists rather than sending an officer to answer every call.

Ms. Feller said that they also have a small forensic department that works to divert those individuals who have mental health issues away from jails and into appropriate programs.

Council Member Pereira thanked Council Member Cruz and Council Member Boyd for providing all this information. She also asked if there was an unwritten rule about Optimus only being on one side of town. Ms. Feller said that Southwest Connecticut Mental Health System works with Optimus. Southwest Connecticut Mental Health System's offices are located at 100 Fairfield Avenue on the second floor.

Council Member Mack joined the meeting at 6:14 p.m. along with Superintendent Testani.

Council Member Small said that she was a foster parent for an autistic child and asked about evening programs for autistic children. Ms. Feller said that they don't offer those programs because their focus is on individuals who are 18 years old and above. She said that DCF would have resources for the evening programs. Child Guidance also offers programs.

Council Member Pereira asked if there was a relationship between the pandemic and mental health. Ms. Feller said that there was an increase across all ages in the State.

Council Member Pereira asked if there was an increase in suicides. Ms. Feller said that she believed it had stayed about the same but there may have been a slight increase.

Council Member McBride-Lee joined the meeting at 6:17 p.m.

Council Member Lyons said that Ms. Feller had given an excellent presentation.

Ms. Carmen Colon of the Alpha Community Services/YMCA and Ms. Cheryl Bell of the Recovery Network of Programs greeted the Committee.

Ms. Colon said that she works with Ms. Bell closely. The shelter will be closing on the 15th. She said that they were not closing their doors. There is a shortage of housing, which is taking more time to place clients. There is also funding available. The services that they provide is for those who have been homeless for six months. Ms. Colon said that they also work with Southwest. There needs to be more collaboration with the other entities that only provide shelters when it is extremely cold or hot.

She said that they have a Family Emergency Shelter, which is currently completely full. They have 23 families and have been able to permanently house 9 families. Last year they had 64 families at the shelter and were able to situation 43 families into permanent housing.

Ms. Bell said that she was with Recovery Programs and they have fifteen locations that offer an array of programs. Ms. Bell said that she was responsible for the housing. When COVID hit, the

shelter went into decompress mode and this affected the overflow capacity. They are in the process for returning to full capacity. They also work closely with DEMAS, as well.

Ms. Bell said that they have three beds that they use for the individuals who are returning from the prison system and are homeless. Ms. Bell said that she wished that the AARPA funds were distributed with more collaboration between groups. Discussion followed.

Council Member Cruz said that he would like to see the City working with these groups. He said that he was very happy to see them open up the overflow shelter.

Council Member Pereira said that Council Member Cruz and Council Member Herron had told them that there were people who did not want to go to a shelter. Ms. Colon said that there was a small portion of the homeless group that do not want to go to a shelter because they have mental health issues. Moving someone into housing is a long process.

Council Member Pereira said that she had heard Ms. Colon say that people have to be homeless for six months. Ms. Colon said that there were different levels of homelessness and those who have been homeless for six months go to the top of the list for permanent housing. Discussion followed about verification and the lack of identification documents for those who are on the streets.

Ms. Bell said that the outreach team work with those homeless individuals who do not want to come in to the shelter or provide the services they need. The discussion moved to the two types of Section 8, which are subsidies. Shelter Plus Care is similar to a project based housing that is administered by DEMAS. The programs are set aside for the homeless population.

Council Member Lyons said that she has known Ms. Bell and Ms. Colon for many years and said that they do a very good job. Ms. Bell thanked Council Member Cruz and Council Member Boyd for the opportunity to bring this information to the Council. Ms. Bell invited the Council Members to come for a tour.

Ms. Colon said that they will be getting some youth units on Boston Avenue for the youth that age out of DCF. On May 21st at 8:30 a.m., there will be a walk for homelessness at Captain's Cove.

Council Member Cruz then greeted Ms. Papa, the Director of Lighthouse Program, and asked if she would be speaking about the grants. Ms. Papa said that she was there regarding the grants but added that she had an 8 p.m. commitment.

Council Member Boyd said that he had met with Superintendent Testani two weeks ago and invited him to speak at the Committee.

Superintendent Testani said that he had been in Hartford recently to speak to the Budget Committee. There is a misconception that there has been an influx of Federal fund to the schools but this is not correct. He said that homelessness and drug abuse often comes from the students not having access to the services that other students do.

Superintendent Testani said that they have financial obligations of \$10 million but if the City continues to give \$2 million, the deficit will continue to grow. The District has lost 243 jobs and the pandemic has added to the situation. He said that in a few years, there will be a \$30 million to \$40 million gap.

Superintendent Testani then spoke about the increased costs of transportation and said that transportation could be cut again if the district continues to have deficits. COVID has created isolation and loss of learning, which will require services. When the AARPA funds run out, the services will go away.

Council Member Cruz asked what the fair amount to cover the request would be. Superintendent Testani said that they need \$8 million or more, but \$4.5 million could make things work for the short term. He said that projects like the amphitheater should not be on the backs of the taxpayers. There are many high level students who need mandated resources and they should come first.

Council Member Pereira asked how much the District had lost since 2016. Superintendent Testani said that he believed it would be around \$40 million to \$50 million.

Council Member Pereira said that the number 1 indicator of a child's success is their socio/economic status. The teachers can walk into a school and get tenure after 5 years. These are not the teachers who are working with the students who have the most needs. ELL students and Special Education students have expensive needs. Over 80% of the students in the District are black, Hispanic or Asian. Superintendent Testani said that 56% of the students are Hispanic and often need ELL.

Council Member Pereira said that the Amphitheater and the Lighthouse are not going to change the student's life. In order to change the future, the City has to invest in the public schools.

Council Member Mack thanked Superintendent Testani for coming to speak to the Committee and the Co-chairs for allowing Superintendent Testani to address the Committee. It is important to keep the dialog going and helping the Bridgeport students.

Council Member Boyd expressed his condolences in the recent passing of a student. Superintendent Testani thanked him and said that the Federal government was committing to a one time amount of funding. Superintendent Testani said that they don't have a Director of English Language, or Social Studies or other subjects.

Council Member Cruz asked what the District was doing to assure the LGBT+ students are accepted. Superintendent Testani said that there was a large population of LGBT+ students at Bassick and that they want to be encouraged them in all the schools. They are often not welcomed in their families, so there needs to be school counsellors and social workers. They don't need to be on the streets, but in school and learning every day. Discussion followed.

Council Member Pereira said about 8 weeks ago, she got a letter from Superintendent Testani because he was losing about \$1.8 million in Alliance Grant funding. Superintendent Testani said

that they were fighting for education, but it was a short legislative session and he felt that they would be out voted.

56-21 Grant Submission re: Connecticut State Department of Education Bureau of Health/Nutrition Family Services and Education – 2017 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant Year 5 of 5 – Lighthouse After-School Program.

57-21 Grant Submission re: Connecticut State Department of Education Bureau of Health/Nutrition Family Services and Education – 2018 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant Year 3 - 5 for Lighthouse After-School Program.

58-21 Grant Submission re: Connecticut State Department of Education Bureau of Health/Nutrition Family Services and Education – 2021 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant Year 1 - 5 for Lighthouse After-School Program.

59-21 Grant Submission re: Connecticut State Department of Education Bureau of Health/Nutrition Family Services and Education – FY21-23 ARP ESSER Enhancement and Expansion After School Grants for Pre-K - 12 - Lighthouse After-School Program.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER PEREIRA MOVED TO TABLE THE FOLLOWING AGENDA ITEMS.**

56-21 GRANT SUBMISSION RE: CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION BUREAU OF HEALTH/NUTRITION FAMILY SERVICES AND EDUCATION – 2017 21ST CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS GRANT YEAR 5 OF 5 – LIGHTHOUSE AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM.

57-21 GRANT SUBMISSION RE: CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION BUREAU OF HEALTH/NUTRITION FAMILY SERVICES AND EDUCATION – 2018 21ST CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS GRANT YEAR 3 - 5 FOR LIGHTHOUSE AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM.

58-21 GRANT SUBMISSION RE: CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION BUREAU OF HEALTH/NUTRITION FAMILY SERVICES AND EDUCATION – 2021 21ST CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS GRANT YEAR 1 - 5 FOR LIGHTHOUSE AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM.

59-21 GRANT SUBMISSION RE: CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION BUREAU OF HEALTH/NUTRITION FAMILY SERVICES AND EDUCATION – FY21-23 ARP ESSER ENHANCEMENT AND EXPANSION AFTER SCHOOL GRANTS FOR PRE-K - 12 - LIGHTHOUSE AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM.

**** COUNCIL MEMBER BOYD SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

ADJOURNMENT

**** COUNCIL MEMBER LYONS MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER PEREIRA SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:25 p.m.