

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES
COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 11, 2023**

ATTENDANCE: Aikeem Boyd, Co-chair; Jorge Cruz, Co-chair; Alfredo Castillo, Michelle Lyons, Maria Pereira, Samia Suliman

STAFF: Thomas Gaudett, Deputy Chief of Staff

OTHER: Council Member(s): Maria Ines Valle & Scott Burns; Council President Aidee Nieves; Larry Robinson; Barbara; Ebony Jackson-Shaheed, Health Department Director; Frank Jacobellis; Dr. Herron Gaston

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Boyd called the meeting to order at 6:05 P.M. There was a quorum present.

APPROVAL OF COMMITTEE MINUTES OF DECEMBER 14, 2022 (REGULAR MEETING).

**** COUNCIL MEMBER CRUZ MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF DECEMBER 14, 2022 AS SUBMITTED.**

**** COUNCIL MEMBER LYONS SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED WITH FIVE (5) IN FAVOR (BOYD, CRUZ, CASTILLO, LYONS, SULIMAN) AND ONE (1) ABSTENTION (PEREIRA).**

INFORMATIONAL SESSION WITH EBONY JACKSON-SHAHEED, DIRECTOR, HEALTH DEPARTMENT; HERRON GASTON, ASSISTANT CAO OR HIS REPRESENTATIVE; RODERICK PORTER, CHIEF OF POLICE LARRY ROBINSON, COORDINATOR, VETERANS AFFAIRS REGARDING AN UPDATE ON HOW SOCIAL SERVICES IS PERFORMING IN VARIOUS DEPARTMENTS.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed came forward to discuss this item. Co-chair Boyd asked for an update on social services in the various departments, how things were going, if there were any issues, and if any help or support was needed.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that they had their Social Services department staff working. They currently have three workers, two of which are clinicians, one being a MSW and two being LCSW. A Director of Clinical Services is present as well. There is one position still available, which is a mental addiction counselor that they are in the process of hiring. They work with clients from that are referred to them from the Police Department, as well as clients referred to them from other departments. As a result, they can go from clients from the health department, or from environmental housing, and walk ins.

They have started off rather slow but have only had four months in the program and their social workers have been extremely busy. There are many cases currently. In the next two months they will be looking at going into phase two of the proposal for the Police Department. They have been working to improve the collaboration between the Police Department and Health Department.

The social workers have been training with the Police Department, attending line-ups, and have been building relationships with police officers and the Department. A curriculum was provided for training that the social workers should go through as well as the Police Department.

Council Member Pereira asked if they were training with the cadets in the academy.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that they were training with the cadets.

Council Member Pereira asked if the curriculum was being taught to the cadets in the academy.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said they had not yet created a curriculum to teach officers and the curriculum was to train social workers.

Council Member Pereira asked if a Deputy that had been discussed during the budgetary process and had been reported to have left did, indeed, leave and if there was a vacancy as a result, and she thought the deputy had not been with them a long time.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that the Deputy of Public Health had, indeed, left but had been with the organization a long time. They are working to fill the vacancy.

Mr. Cruz asked why the Director of the Social Services Department was not invited to participate in the meeting. Discussion followed as to if he had been invited or not.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that she was not sure if he was aware that there was a meeting.

Mr. Cruz asked if they were going to fill the vacancy with a bilingual people.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that they were.

Mr. Cruz asked how many of the social workers were bilingual or spoke Spanish at the minimum.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said two of the three did.

Mr. Cruz asked if they had experience in this field of work.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said they all had a master's in social work.

Council Member Valle said that she had recently received a call from a resident who had seen a homeless individual in the area for over a month. The police had been to the area though she did not know what actions had been taken. She had called Ms. Jackson-Shaheed's office several times and was redirected to a Mr. Hunter. Council Member Valle noted that the area was

concerning because of the presence of children. The man had been loud and rude to the resident who had called Council Member Valle. Mr. Hunter had promised to call back soon but had not. Council Member Valle expressed concern over the procedures in place for reporting calls as a result. She also asked when they could meet the individuals that had been hired to work in the communities and if there was a place to counsel people and to reach out in the event of a crisis. Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that, if there was an issue or social service concern, there was a number on the website for social services. Social workers were available on Monday through Friday at regular working hours. She said it was unfortunate that Mr. Hunter had not returned the call but that it was not likely intentional. There is also a referral remain that is on the website as well. They are currently working on a form that can be put out as a PDF that can be filled out and sent to social workers. Further discussion followed regarding the procedures in place, especially regarding phone calls.

Council Member Pereira said that she had had a constituent call her regarding a rebate program and raised concerns regarding Ms. Wong and why Ms. Wong was in the Health Department when she worked with seniors and aging, which would require her to be near the Senior Center.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that the location that Ms. Wong had asked to meet the constituent at was her office. There is currently ongoing restructuring as well. The space allows for privacy and, regarding social service, had a larger conference room.

Council Member Pereira asked if the social workers who had just been hired were tied to the Bridgeport Police Department or if they were something separate and unique.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that the social workers that had been hired were hired out of the collaborative pilot program that is tied to the Police Department. She said that there were other needs for the city and that there were other needs for the residents. She then reviewed how the process was handled.

Council Member Pereira asked to clarify if this meant that the social workers were not placed inside of the Police Department.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that they were never placed inside of the Police Department. They were always placed in Health and Social Services and had their own department.

Council Member Pereira asked if there were any social workers working from midnight to 8 A.M.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that there were not and they were currently working on going into the second and third phase.

Council Member Burns said that, when the Council had funded these positions, the goal was to promote less lethal types of potential interactions between constituents and those in need. As such the idea was to link the Police Department with Social Services. As a result, there should be an emphasis on that since it was the funding intention. He asked if they could characterize any of the interactions so-far that have included constituents and Police and Social Services.

A Police Lieutenant came forward to discuss this item. He said that the social workers had attended his lineups and he had seen them with the police. He had not personally seen them acting at the scene of incidents. He did not know if that had occurred or not though. He asked Council Member Valle if she had a location or date for the incident with the homeless man so he could look into the situation.

Council Member Valle provided information regarding the incident with the homeless man. Council Member Burns requested data for the number and type of interactions and locations and other information.

Council Member Pereira expressed concern that the social workers were working Monday to Friday from 999 Broad Street. She said that, since the point was to prevent Police Officers from dealing with people who had mental health issues or other issues, having the Social Workers in their offices and unavailable at certain times at which point the incident would need to wait till Monday, this was not the program that they had desired. She said they had desired the social workers going out with the Police Officers, possibly instead of the Police Officers, which had been successful in other locations in the country, and this was not what the point of hiring the social workers was. She said they should be working nights and weekends, rotating shifts, and working directly with the Police Department.

Council Member Cruz said he also desired that data; but he knew they had been there for only a short amount of time and were overwhelmed. He said that they were supposed to be collaborating with the Police Department and he had not heard if any of the workers had rotated into the night shift. Further discussion regarding the shifts and working with the Police Department followed. He also praised a positive interaction that had been done by two of the Police Officers. Further discussion followed regarding getting the social workers to work with the Police Officers.

Mr. Robinson came forward to discuss this item. He said that the social workers had done a good job working with the Veterans Department. It has greatly reduced their workload. They have had wonderful experiences working with the social workers. Many of the veterans have various forms of disabilities and having the workers present has been a huge help. He outlined how the workers had helped the Department with the veterans.

Council Member Pereira said she was concerned about affordable housing, housing for people with disabilities, and housing for veterans. She wished that Mr. Robinson would speak about the housing crisis for veterans.

Mr. Robinson confirmed that there is a crisis. They have agencies that they work with that reach out to the homeless and people with disabilities. He reviewed the process and how they worked with social services. He noted that, in new constructions, people often needed to be reminded to price properly for people with disabilities and those who are of a lower economic level.

Council Member Pereira asked if Mr. Robinson thought about an ordinance that specifically put in writing that every one or two bedroom that's handicapped room for veterans with a specific tax break per unit.

Mr. Robinson said he didn't think it would hurt the crisis. He said she should look for advice from people more versed in that area than he was. Further discussion followed regarding the proposed ordinance.

Council Member Cruz praised the work done by Mr. Robinson. He said that there was a problem regarding affordable housing, which he reviewed for those present.

Council President Nieves asked about the timeline regarding having the veterans move into a new building that had been retrofitted. She wished to also know if there would be computers in the building to train the veterans.

Ms. Jackson-Shaheed said that the building had gone out to bid but there were currently no bids on the project. A second bid was planned on January 23, 2023. Around 10 contractors/representatives have come out to look at the project. However, the building is not currently under contract.

ADJOURNMENT

- ** COUNCIL MEMBER LYONS MOVED TO ADJOURN.**
- ** COUNCIL MEMBER CRUZ SECONDED THE MOTION.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:09 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted

Ian A. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services