

Health & Human Services Committee Minutes

May 26, 2026

Members Present: Committee Chair Anthony Doldo, Legislators Robert Cantwell, Karen Freeman, Christopher Boulio, Frances Calarco, Corey Grant, Board Chair William Johnson

Others Present: Legislators Philip Reed, Michael Montigelli, Daniel McBride, James Nabywaniec, Patrick Jareo, Robert Ferris, Steel Potter, County Administrator Ryan Piche, Deputy Administrator Dylan Soper, County Attorney John Sabik, Office for the Aging Director Bethany Munn, Community Services Director Tim Ruetten, Community Services Preschool Coordinator Ljuba Cvetkovic, Public Health Director Steve Jennings, Social Services Commissioner Karen Marcum, DSS Director of Housing and Special Initiatives Jillian Redder, Veterans Service Agency Director Dave Pavey, Planning Director Hartley Bonisteel-Schweitzer, Employment & Training Director Cheryl Mayforth, County Treasurer Brian Peck, Deputy Treasurer Melissa VanBrocklin, Confidential Secretary Jaimie Lee, Confidential Secretary Jill Jones

Chairman Doldo called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. The Committee approved the minutes of the April meeting as written. Chairman Doldo offered Privilege of the Floor.

Lisa Wilson, Adams, expressed concern about the growing number of cancer cases in Jefferson County, particularly in the Adams/Mannsville area, and especially in young children. She has reached out to Jefferson County Public Health and the New York State Department of Health and is alarmed that more research and education is not being done. She didn't know where to begin to assist with those efforts and asked for suggestions and direction. She also asked that legislators advocate in Albany for more funding for cancer research. Chairman Doldo advised that Public Health Director Steve Jennings has been in contact with NYS DOH on this and he will keep everyone aware of any movement regarding this issue.

Eric Harris, co-owner of Building Blocks SLP, OT & PT Family Services with his wife Traci Harris who provide Preschool Related Services outlined the rate structure and lack of increased rates for these services since 2005 when they started providing the service. He said the demand has increased substantially and exceeds the approved providers, the administration and documentation required is burdensome, and it is getting harder to attract qualified therapists. They want to do what is right for the children who need services and advocated for a 15% increase in their rates so they can continue to provide those services.

Tim Ruetten made a presentation to the Committee regarding Jefferson County's Preschool Special Education Program, which has seen a 39% increase in student enrollment since 2021. He outlined the referral process and said while total enrollment has increased, the distribution between service types has remained relatively consistent with approximately 80% of children receiving related services and 20% participating in center-based programs. The program's budget has expanded to accommodate increased demand and rising service costs.

Annual payments for services rose from \$3,786,896.02 in 2021 to \$6,343,869.15 in 2025 and transportation expenditures more than doubled from \$517,304.07 in 2021 to \$1,234,966.64 in 2025. The County has optimized its Medicaid revenue recovery by implementing the McGuinness Full-Service Medicaid Module with projected 2026 revenue exceeding \$500,000. NYSED-approved evaluation rates saw a 1% increase in July 2021 and a 5% increase in July 2024. He said the County is proposing a 5% increase in related services rates and a 4% rural/underserved modifier and eliminating separate rate structures for assistants, which is in line with Department of Health Early Intervention Program guidelines. The County manages these mandated services under NYSED regulations to ensure services in the least restrictive environment.

County Administrator Ryan Piche, Deputy Administrator Dylan Soper and DSS Director of Housing and Special Initiatives Jillian Redder reviewed the homeless data since it was last presented to the Committee in March, 2025. Administrator Piche reminded the Committee that we are not looking to solve the homelessness issue, but we are looking to manage it as best we can through data collection and appropriate programming.

Deputy Administrator Soper advised that the Board authorized a contract for a data analytics dashboard and it has been in place for almost a year. He said this is a difficult population to try and track and provided graphics depicting each of the following trends over the past year: the number of individuals experiencing street homelessness; what services and programs they are currently utilizing; where people experiencing homelessness are coming from; how they are moving through various programs; and how the programs and services have lead to temporary or permanent housing for some of these individuals.

Director Redder advised that the County programs and initiatives put in place to serve the homeless population include 12 staff members in a Social Services Permanent Housing Unit and a Social Services Temporary/Emergency Housing unit; 3 year-round warming/cooling centers, 7 permanent housing programs, 2 homeless prevention programs; and 2 street outreach teams who work directly with the unhoused population to build trust and influence change. She provided the following statistics for the past year:

Street Outreach & Centers:

NRCIL: Reached 109 people across 927 encounters, resulting in 27 positive housing outcomes.

ACR Health: Reached 62 people with 4 positive housing outcomes. (started August, 2025)

Warming/Cooling Centers:

The Salvation Army served 222 people.

New Life Christian Church served 163 people; both remained open for their first summer.

Emmanuel Congregational Church – program open to all, addressing food insecurity, including unhoused individuals.

Temporary Housing Assistance:

Provided emergency hotel/motel placements for 447 single individuals and 73 families.

The top reason for placement was eviction (239 cases), followed by release from institutions (132 cases).

Permanent Housing: Supported 177 households (353 people) across permanent supportive housing, rental assistance, and rapid rehousing programs.

Ms. Redder added that the total 2026 budget for leveraged assistance to vulnerable housing populations is \$14,341,264. This includes significant allocations for Safety Net Assistance (\$4.25M), Family Assistance Programs (\$3.35M), and Direct Housing Staff Costs (\$1.25M). To address affordability, nearly 200 supportive housing units are scheduled to come online by 2027, she said they are working with communities that want to build more housing, and the County is also conducting a Housing Needs Assessment through an Ad Hoc Committee. Chairman Doldo thanked Ms. Redder and the outreach teams that are assisting this population daily as a lot of work has gone into these efforts.

County Administrator Piche highlighted the 10th Annual Career Jam, held May 21, 2026, at the Watertown Municipal Area and Agricultural Hall. He congratulated Employment & Training Director Cheryl Mayforth on the successful event, which engaged thousands of eighth graders and many local businesses across five counties. He also acknowledged a congratulatory letter received from Governor Hochul marking the event's 10th anniversary.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Authorizing Agreements for the Provision of Rent for Congregate Meal Sites for Nutrition Program Services through the Office for the Aging and Amending the 2026 County Budget in Relation Thereto and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Cantwell seconded Legislator Calarco and there being no debate, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Authorizing an Agreement with ACR Health for Homelessness Street Outreach and Amending the 2026 County Budget in Relation Thereto and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Calarco seconded by Legislator Grant and there being no debate, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Authorizing Agreements with New York State Department of Education Approved Agencies for the Provision of Special Education Services for Preschool Children with Disabilities and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Boulio seconded by Legislator Cantwell and there being no debate, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Authorizing Agreements and Establishing Rates for Provision of Related Services in Connection with the Program for Preschool Children with Disabilities and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Boulio seconded by Legislator Calarco and there being no debate, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Amending the 2026 County Budget for Community Services Mental Health Programs and Authorizing an Amended Agreement with the Mental Health Association and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made

by Legislator Freeman seconded by Legislator Boullo and there being no debate, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Amending the 2026 County Budget in Relation to the New York State Department of Health Lead Rental Registry Grant Program and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Boullo seconded by Legislator Grant and there being no debate, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

Chairman Doldo introduced a resolution Appointing Members to the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Advisory Board and entertained a motion for consideration. A motion was duly made by Legislator Cantwell seconded by Legislator Calarco and there being no debate, the Committee agreed to sponsor the resolution as presented.

There being no further business of the Committee, on a motion by Legislator Calarco seconded by Legislator Grant and unanimously carried, the meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ryan Piche". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ryan" and last name "Piche" clearly distinguishable.

Ryan Piche
Clerk of the Board