

**HEALTH, SOCIAL, EDUCATIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE MEETING  
HELD IN ROOM #318  
PUTNAM COUNTY OFFICE BUILDING  
CARMEL, NEW YORK 10512**

**Chairwoman Sayegh, Legislators Addonizio & Jonke**

**Tuesday**

**6:30PM**

**May 17, 2022**

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The meeting was called to order at 6:30 P.M. by Chairwoman Sayegh who requested that Legislator Addonizio lead in the Pledge of Allegiance. Upon roll call Legislators Addonizio, Jonke and Chairwoman Sayegh were present.

**Item #3 - Discussion/PeerRX App/Founder Marisa Barberi**

Legislator Addonizio stated she met PeerRX Founder Marisa Barberi at the NYSAC (New York State Association of Counties) Conference and was very excited about this important tool to help people that are struggling. She stated the County has a very successful peer to peer program for veterans and this app is a similar concept.

Ms. Barberi thanked the Committee for allowing her to present PeerRx. She noted that she is the CEO of a Software Development Firm. She gave an overview of her background and previous work experience. She stated that PeerRx was written by a team of full-staff developers. She stated that the app could potentially save lives. She explained that the app finds the user a peer. She defined peer as someone with lived experience of substance use or mental health crisis. She stated that the Office of Addiction Services and Supports, New York State Office of Mental Health, and Samsung have recognized peers as being a part of the process of recovery and healing for people who are suffering from substance abuse and mental health issues. She stated that PeerRx is implemented in a county at sites such as hospitals, drug courts, jails, crisis call centers, and mobile crisis units. She stated that upon pushing a button, resources across the county are notified to come assist the individual in crisis. She stated that PeerRx has been in Rockland and Orange County since 2019. She stated that in Alabama, PeerRx was designated as a major tool to fight the opioid crisis. She stated that PeerRx connected 65% of the users to harm reduction. She stated that she spoke with Sheriff McConville and that they believed PeerRx could also work through connecting the network to the Sheriff's department. In doing so, the Sheriff's department could reach out to the PeerRx providers for assistance, as well. She stated the app functions through a dashboard that runs 24/7 and that peers are found in under ten (10) minutes. She stated that the peers are trained in New York State and that PeerRx has certified peers. She stated that peers do not join PeerRx independently, but that they join through "peer providers", such as Independent Living, ADAP, and Mental Health of Putnam County.

Legislator Addonizio questioned what the price of PeerRx would be. She stated that while people may be excited, they are also concerned.

Ms. Barberi stated she uses a software used in hospitals. She stated the price is per site. She stated that the number of calls would not impact the set price. She stated the price starts at \$149

per month, but that \$289 per month is the ideal subscription. She stated that an added benefit of this program is that the County will receive insight into the needs of the community based on the number of calls made.

Legislator Nacerino stated she believes the program is wonderful. She questioned who oversees the mechanics of PeerRx. She also questioned who gauges the success of the communication between the patient and the peer.

Ms. Barberi answered that PeerRx oversees the connection between patient and peer. She stated that other protocols are outside of PeerRx.

Legislator Nacerino questioned what the peer does.

Ms. Barberi stated consent to contact a peer must first be given by the patient. Once the patient consents, PeerRx can be used to access available peers. She stated that once the peer and patient are connected, the peer helps the patient find the best path to recovery. She stated that peer referral increased 225% at an Orange County site in its first month of use.

Legislator Nacerino questioned how long the peer stays with the patient.

Ms. Barberi answered that the peer stays as long as they deem necessary.

Legislator Sayegh questioned what experience with substance abuse and mental health the peers must have to be qualified.

Ms. Barberi answered that in New York State, the peers must attest to having lived experience with substance abuse and mental health. She stated they take courses and become certified. She stated that while there can be peers who are not certified on the network, PeerRx has the ability to screen those that are certified and provide more referrals to them. She stated that this project had a beta test in Orange County during which they were asked to give the referrals to the certified peers first, but allow non-certified peers on the network.

Legislator Montgomery questioned whether PeerRx takes individuals as peers or whether peers come from an agency.

Ms. Barberi stated that individuals are not taken. She stated that an agency must join the network and subsequently provide their peers.

Legislator Montgomery questioned whether the agency would provide insurance coverage.

Ms. Barberi answered yes.

Legislator Montgomery stated while she is a big fan of the project, she has concerns about background checks for the peers. She stated concerns about potential predatory peers.

Ms. Barberi stated that the rules to join the PeerRx network specify that only agencies who vet their peers can join. She also stated that an agency who designates one of their peers as certified must show proof of certification. She stated that potential predatory peers cannot be avoided, however, she can look into ways to increase comfort.

Legislator Montgomery questioned whether the \$289 per month subscription would have to only be paid by the county or if each agency would have to pay this subscription.

Ms. Barberi answered that each agency would have to pay this subscription. She reiterated that PeerRx cannot be used by consumers, but can only be used when on site of an involved agency.

Legislator Montgomery questioned whether patients who are minors would be paired with peers who are minors.

Ms. Barberi answered that she did not know. She stated that the underage patient would still receive a peer in the area. She stated that the program is de-identified and that there is no PHI in the product. She stated that when an alert goes out to peers, there is no information that is tied to the person in need of assistance.

Legislator Montgomery asked to see a demonstration.

Chairwoman Sayegh stated she would like to give Commissioner of Social Services Piazza a chance to comment.

Commissioner Piazza reiterated how the subscription to the PeerRx network works. He stated that he does not know how cases of minors would be handled. He stated that this project will take a lot of coordination among all the stakeholders and willingness to pay for the subscription.

Chairwoman Sayegh stated that Legislator Nacerino had invited Susan Salomone from Drug Crisis in our Backyard to speak on the topic.

Ms. Salomone questioned where the peers are coming from. She asked for clarification as to whether the peers are paid for by the agency they are a part of. She noted that an organization in Westchester only has two (2) peers and she is concerned as to how a sufficient number of peers can be achieved in Putnam County.

Ms. Barberi confirmed that the peers are paid for by the agency that they are a part of.

Commissioner Piazza stated that all the agencies he previously mentioned that operate in Putnam County employ peers.

Ms. Barberi stated that although there are a limited number of peers, there are benefits of reaching out to multiple agencies at once through PeerRx.

Chairwoman Sayegh asked for clarification as to whether the facility is responsible for the peers.

Ms. Barberi confirmed.

Legislator Albano expressed that PeerRx is a great idea and is worth trying.

Legislator Nacerino stated she still has concerns and that the program seems convoluted. She questioned whether the peers are certified by New York State.

Ms. Barberi answered yes.

Legislator Nacerino question whether the peers have an educational background in mental health.

Ms. Barberi reiterated the importance of having peers with lived experience in crisis.

Legislator Nacerino referenced the questions asked previously by Legislator Montgomery. She stated she is still unsure about how the project will roll out.

Ms. Barberi stated that Putnam County can reach out to Ulster and Orange County to learn about how PeerRx has been implemented there.

Legislator Montgomery stated that PeerRx sounds like an automated version of what the Department of Social Services is already doing. She stated that the Department of Social Services has the same reach to agencies throughout Putnam County.

Commissioner Piazza stated that people do not generally call the Department of Social Services, but call an agency directly. He stated that the advantage of PeerRx is multiple agencies can be reached at once.

Ms. Salomone questioned whether someone is available to ensure there was contact between the peer and the patient.

Ms. Barberi stated that should the peer not arrive, the agency employing the peer has a protocol.

#### **Item #4 - Discussion/Let's Talk Lakes Program/Cornell Cooperative Extension Executive Director Stefanie Hubert**

Maureen Perotti represented the Cornell Cooperative Extension in the discussion. Director Stefanie Hubert could not be present.

Ms. Perotti thanked the committee for the invitation to speak. She stated that the Let's Talk Lakes Program is a partnership between New York State Federation of Lakes Association, Town of Kent Lake Association, and Putnam County. She stated that she is a liaison between all the partners. She stated that she has been a Putnam County resident for thirty (30) years and has resided in two lake communities during this time period. She stated she is the Lake Chair of the Seven Hills Lake Property Owners Association and represents Seven Hills Lake on the all-volunteer KLA. She stated she is a master gardener and conducts educational programs through

Cornell Cooperative Extension. She stated that she believes it is fitting for Putnam County to be leading in educational endeavors. She stated that Putnam County lakes have a considerable amount of users and stakeholders. She stated that clean water and healthy ecosystems enhance recreational experiences, protect wildlife, and protect property values. She stated that Putnam County is critical to the New York City water supply, since many Putnam County lakes are a part of the Croton Watershed. She stated that two (2) Putnam County lakes have been designated by New York State as impaired waterbodies. She stated that in 2017, New York State launched a \$2.5 billion Clean Water Infrastructure Act. She stated that in 2018, New York State allocated \$65 million for an initiative to combat harmful algae blooms. She stated that this is a lot of taxpayer dollars. She stated that in the 2018 initiative, a water quality rapid response team was assembled to focus on twelve (12) priority lakes in New York State. She stated that Lake Palmer and Lake Carmel are among the twelve (12) priority lakes undergoing study. She stated that the Let's Talk Lakes Program is designed to educate the public and lake associations about evidence-based, best management practices for protecting lakes and water quality, as well as decreasing nutrient pollution. She stated the program is very robust with seven (7) keynote speakers and hands-on training for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Citizens Statewide Lake Assessment Program (CSLAP).

Chairwoman Sayegh thanked Ms. Perotti. She stated she hoped to attend. She encouraged Putnam County residents who reside by a lake or anyone who cares about lakes and water quality to attend. She stated that CSLAP training is very important in addressing issues regarding lakes.

Ms. Perotti stated that the only other CSLAP training opportunity is in Lake George.

Legislator Montgomery reiterated that lake education is very important for lake communities. She stated that Putnam County has been without a Soil and Water Director for some time.

Chairwoman Sayegh clarified that there is an Acting Soil and Water Director.

#### **Item #5 - Discussion/Update/Overview of Mental Health Initiatives/Commissioner of Social Services Michael Piazza and Deputy Commissioner of Social Services Sara Servadio**

Chairwoman Sayegh thanked Commissioner of Social Services Piazza and Deputy Commissioner of Social Services Servadio for attending.

Commissioner Piazza stated that County Executive Odell asked him to provide an overview on the crisis stabilization center and the opiate center response. He stated that County Executive Odell has committed funding for the establishment of a crisis stabilization center. He stated that there is one New York State agency that is willing to open a crisis stabilization center in Putnam County, as well as assist Putnam County in obtaining a license from the Office of Mental Health and the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services. He stated that while it is not the most ideal location, DSS is currently looking into having the crisis stabilization center in the Putnam Hospital Center. He stated that a representative from People, Inc. believed this is a possibility. He stated that he and Deputy Commissioner Servadio met with PHC to gauge their willingness to collaborate. He stated that PHC is willing. He stated that a downside to the crisis stabilization center being in the hospital is that there could be a stigma that could cause people to

believe they are entering a hospital psychiatric unit or emergency room. He stated there is space available with separate entrances that can be used to clarify that the crisis stabilization is separate from the emergency room or psychiatric unit. He stated that a crisis stabilization center is visited voluntarily. He stated that people will be able to stay for twenty-three and a half (23.5) hours.

Deputy Commissioner Servadio stated that the Putnam County crisis stabilization center can be modeled off of the center in Poughkeepsie, NY with adjustments made to fit the needs of Putnam County. She stated that the environment in the crisis stabilization center will be welcoming. She stated there will be peers, social workers, and community providers on site. She stated the center is for children and adults.

Commissioner Piazza stated there are benefits to a crisis stabilization center. He stated that there has been a five (5) year budget created. He stated that after a few years, this will be a self-sustaining program.

Chairwoman Sayegh questioned whether the self-sustainment of the program would be based off of billing and insurance.

Commissioner Piazza answered yes.

Deputy Commissioner Servadio stated that peers are able to bill for their services as well.

Commissioner Piazza stated that a visit to the crisis stabilization center will be a fraction of the cost of a visit to the emergency room.

Chairwoman Sayegh questioned what would happen in the case of children or individuals who do not have insurance.

Commissioner Piazza stated that under the Affordable Care Act, most individuals under the age of twenty-six (26) are covered under their parent's health insurance. He stated that there are also other possibilities through Medicaid. He stated that there are approximately 3,000 people in Putnam County who are covered by Medicaid.

Chairwoman Sayegh stated that a crisis stabilization center is a much-needed service. She questioned whether Putnam County would be paying for the space.

Commissioner Piazza answered that People, Inc. would be paying for the space. He stated the lease is only between PHC and People Inc. He stated that Putnam County would be funding the program for two (2) years. He reiterated that the five (5) year budget demonstrates that the project will be self-sustaining.

Chairwoman Sayegh asked for an estimate of the amount of funding by Putnam County.

Commissioner Piazza stated that the funding will be granted through the American Rescue Plan Act.

Legislator Jonke expressed support for this project.

Legislator Montgomery stated this would be a great resource for Putnam County. She questioned whether all the opiate settlement money would be going into this project.

Commissioner Piazza answered no. He stated that County Executive Odell felt that there could be some opiate settlement money that goes into this. He stated that this would be a long planning process.

Legislator Montgomery questioned what the plan for the opiate settlement money is.

Commissioner Piazza stated that there is no plan currently, however it will be discussed. He stated the attorney general's press release stated there was \$900,000 in settlement. He stated these are individual settlements with all the pharmaceutical companies. He stated each settlement is different with different payout periods. He stated that there is a list of approved uses for the money. He stated that the restricted funding is to be used for programs that reduce opioid dependency and increase prevention. He stated that the non-restricted funding can be put towards what the County decides. He stated that Putnam County will meet with all of the stakeholders to identify the gaps in services.

Commissioner Piazza stated that in the state budget that passed there was a repeal on a social services law that allowed the placement of a lien on the property of individuals who claimed temporary assistance and safety net benefits. He stated that any current liens will have to be discharged by Putnam County. He stated it does not affect the Medicaid liens.

**Item #6 - Approval/Budgetary Amendment 22A035/Health Department/Purchase Compost Bins for Sale to the Public as part of Recycling Programs**

Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to approve Budgetary Amendment 22A035; Seconded by Legislator Jonke. All in favor.

**Item #7 - Other Business - None**

**Item #8 - Adjournment**

There being no further business, at 7:45 P.M., Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to adjourn; Seconded by Legislator Jonke. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Legislative Intern, Tanya Ramirez.