

10. DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

Federal and State laws require the Department of Social Services (DSS) to assist and care for persons in Suffolk County who need and are declared eligible for public assistance, medical assistance, food stamps, energy or housing assistance. The Department is required also to provide protective services for vulnerable adults and children, and services to keep children and families together in order to prevent the need for foster care. DSS is the mandated agency for implementing the enforcement of child support programs, including paternity determination, locating absent parents and collecting family support monies.

The Department currently provides public assistance, Medicaid, housing and other financial aid services to County residents through Service Centers located in Edgewood (South Shore), Wyandanch, Brookhaven (Coram), Riverhead and Smithtown (Hauppauge). Child Support Enforcement Services and Adult Protective Services are provided at Oser Avenue in Hauppauge, and Family and Children's Services are provided at the Equipark site in Ronkonkoma.

The Commissioner of the Department of Social Services has an Advisory Council of 25 to 30 representatives of the general public, providers of DSS services, and clients or former clients. Appointed by the Commissioner, they serve two-year terms.

CLIENT BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION

Through the following programs, the Client Benefits Division provides money, housing, food, child care and employment assistance to low income families.

Family Assistance (FA) is the successor program to the ADC program in New York State. Family Assistance can only be provided to a family that includes a minor child living with a parent or caretaker relative, or to a pregnant woman.

Safety Net Assistance Program (SNAP), formally known as Home Relief, provides help to individuals whose income and resources do not meet basic needs, and who have no legally responsible relatives to support them. Families

not eligible for Family Assistance may qualify for Safety Net Assistance.

Food Stamp Program provides coupons to needy persons to purchase food. The purpose of the Food Stamp Program is to reduce hunger and malnutrition among the members of low-income families. Public Assistance recipients and other low-income families are eligible to receive this benefit.

Disabled Client Assistance Program (DCAP) helps disabled individuals, who are in receipt of Public Assistance, obtain Federal Social Security benefits.

Emergency Assistance helps to meet shelter, fuel, repair, utility, food, and other essential needs of households faced with sudden emergencies.

Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), a Federal program, provides energy assistance to low-income and elderly households.

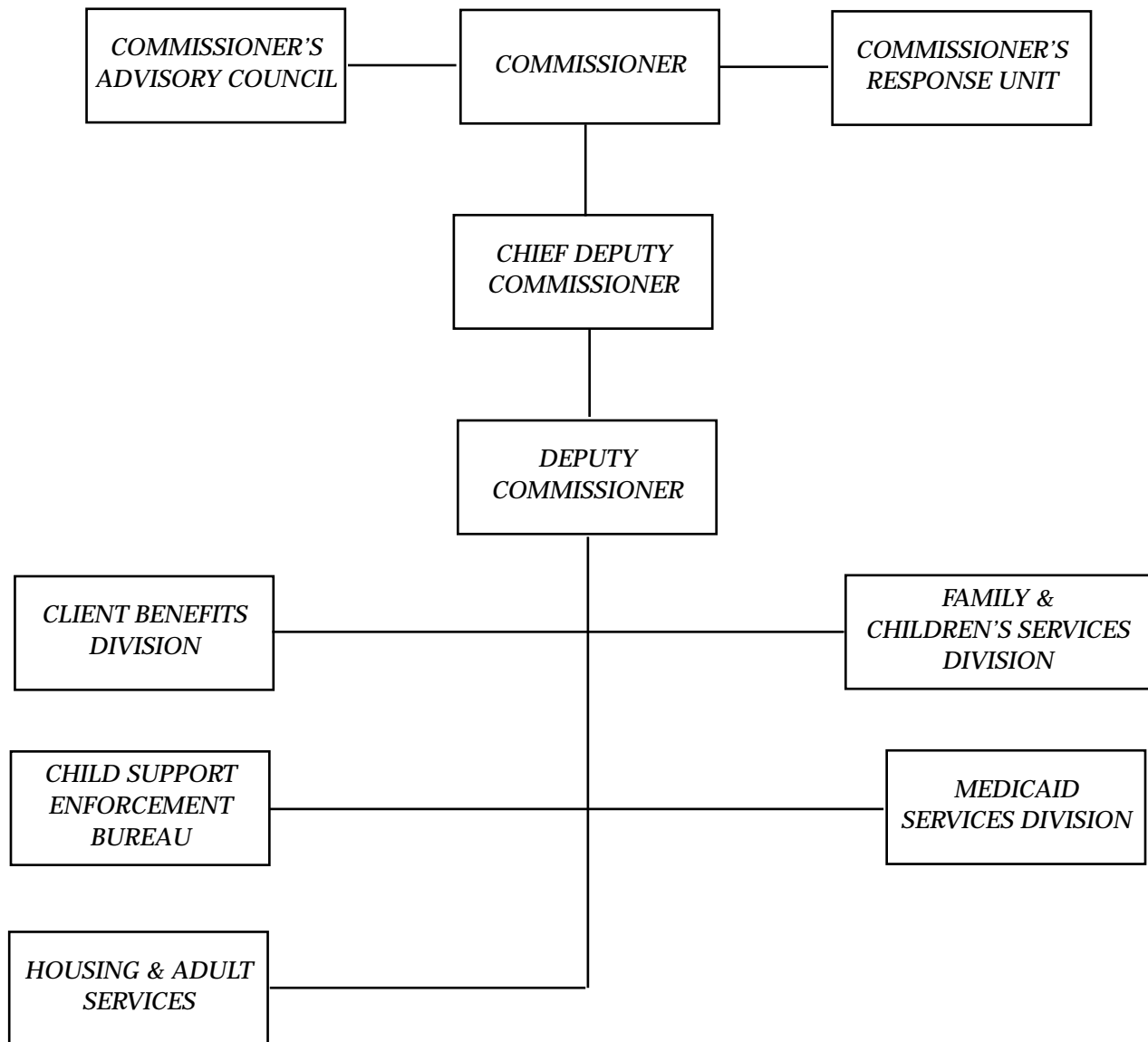
The Suffolk Works Employment Program (SWEPE) helps Public Assistance recipients attain self-sufficiency through training, education and job placement. The Suffolk County Department of Labor carries out many components of this program.

Day Care Services provides care for children, between the ages of 6 weeks and 13 years, in licensed day care centers, school age child care programs, group family day care homes, registered family day care homes and informal child care programs. Families must meet income and program eligibility guidelines to receive child care services.

FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

Family & Children's Services is responsible for helping clients achieve or maintain economic independence; for preserving, reuniting, or rehabilitating families; and for preventing or remedying neglect, abuse or exploitation of children. Services are provided through the Child Protective Services Bureau and the Child Placement Bureau. The following major programs are included:

FIGURE 10.1
DEPARTMENT OF OF SOCIAL SERVICES



Child Protective Services investigates reports of child abuse and neglect made to the New York State Central Register "Hotline" (800-342-3720). The Bureau provides and coordinates child protective and rehabilitative services to the child and the family.

Preventive Services provides counseling services to assist families in staying together when a child is at risk of entering foster care and/or to hasten the return home of children in foster care. This may include referrals for supportive services.

Child Placement Bureau places children who are in the custody of the Commissioner of Social Services in family foster homes, group homes, or licensed child care institutions. Room and board, clothing, medical care and other special needs are supplied by this service.

Adoption Unit arranges for placement of children who are legally free for adoption in appropriate adoptive homes. The Unit also monitors the adoptive home until the legal adoption is finalized.

Additional Services that are provided:

Services are provided to Public Assistance or Foster Care children to enable them to attend summer camp.

Homemaker Services provides assistance with light household chores, such as shopping, laundry, food preparation, and running errands. It is intended to serve families with children when a caretaker is ill, incapacitated or absent as part of a protective or preventive services plan, or for adults because of illness or incapacity.

Teenage Services (TASA) helps teenage parents receiving Public Assistance to reach self-sufficiency, thereby reducing the possibility of further pregnancies during the teen years.

Victims of Domestic Violence are provided services through several agencies under contract with the Department. Services consist of shelter, counseling, support groups, and court advocacy.

Family Planning refers people to various organizations that provide information and counseling on limiting family size.

Services for Unwed Parents provides counseling, planning, shelter, and other services for

unwed parents who wish to keep their children after delivery or wish to place their children for adoption.

HOUSING AND ADULT SERVICES

Protective Services for Adults (PSA) is provided to adults, 18 or older, who are unable to protect their own interests and whose well-being is in danger because of mental or physical impairments. Potential PSA clients have unmet essential needs, such as food, clothing, shelter, or medical care and have no one willing or able to help. Adults in need of protective services may include the frail elderly, the mentally disabled, the mentally retarded and developmentally disabled, the seriously ill, the physically disabled, and alcohol and substance abusers.

Housing Services are provided to persons who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless. In addition to providing temporary emergency shelter to the homeless and assisting them in relocating to permanent housing, the Central Housing unit also completes building inspections, authorizes temporary housing placements/removals and provides school and other transportation services to recipients.

MEDICAID SERVICES DIVISION

Medicaid provides essential medical services for persons receiving Public Assistance and other low-income families. Federally mandated services include in-patient and out-patient hospital care; skilled nursing care; laboratory and x-ray services; physician services; early and periodic screening, diagnosis and treatment of children; home health-care services and transportation services.

CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT BUREAU

The goals of the **Child Support Program** are to ensure that children are supported by their parents, to develop family responsibility, and to reduce or eliminate the costs of Public Assistance. The collection of child support helps Public Assistance families move toward self-sufficiency, and helps families who are struggling financially to remain independent.

The Child Support Enforcement Bureau (CSEB) is responsible for locating absent parents, establishing legal paternity for children born outside of marriage, obtaining support orders,

monitoring and enforcing compliance with support orders, and cooperating with other child support jurisdictions nationwide. CSEB provides these services to all custodial parents receiving Public Assistance and to other custodial parents on request.

HOW TO CONTACT THE DEPARTMENT

Persons seeking information about the Suffolk County Department of Social Services can call

the Commissioner's Response Unit at (631) 854-9935 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays. After 4:30 p.m. and during weekends and holidays, individuals may call the Emergency Hotline at (631) 854-9100.

For further information concerning resources and referrals, educational or recreational programs, and other services, see the listing in this book, "Important Suffolk County Information Sources".



Photo by Henry Mangels

Peconic River Queen Paddlewheeler, Riverhead, NY