The St. Lawrence County Board of Health (hereafter typed SLCBOH) met on Tuesday, December 13, 2011 in the 2nd floor conference room of the Human Services Center, Canton, New York.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Jim Bunstone, Benjamin Gruda, Gregory Healey, Robert Kimmes, Timothy Monroe, and Anthony Tramontano

**PUBLIC HEALTH STAFF PRESENT:** Susan Hathaway, Director and Debra Bridges, Fiscal Manager

**MEETING TO ORDER**

President Benjamin Gruda called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm.

Mr. Gruda introduced Mr. Mark Akins as one of our county legislators who was present as a member of the public. He asked Mr. Akins to introduce himself to SLCBOH.

Mr. Akins told the Board that he was the legislator for District 2 and attended tonight’s meeting to gain as much information as possible on the Certified Home Health Agency Program (CHHA) as he has been asked to sit on the task force for the CHHA Program.

**MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 20, 2011 MEETING**

Mr. Gruda asked for a motion to accept the minutes as written. Mr. Bunstone made the motion and Mr. Monroe seconded the motion. The minutes were approved as written.

**COMMUNICATION**

There were no communications to discuss.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were no public comments.
**REPORTS**

Debra Bridges prepared a financial overview of the CHHA Program and a copy was placed in each member's packet.

Ms. Bridges commented that at the last meeting she had attended the Board had requested more information and that is what this financial overview was trying to address. There was a question regarding what the CHHA Program actually pays for in the Public Health Department. The Board had also requested more precise information explaining the discrepancy as to the savings the county would see if the CHHA Program was discontinued.

Ms. Bridges told the Board that CHHA supports approximately 44 positions which are specific to the CHHA Program. These positions will no longer exist if CHHA does not exist. This represents the elimination of 28 full-time and 16 part-time positions. Ms. Bridges also asked the Board to keep in mind these figures were prepared a couple of months ago, but the department has lost staff since that time. She went on to explain that the second listing of positions are positions that the CHHA Program partially supports and are shared with other programs. These positions would remain if CHHA is discontinued and the portion that CHHA has been supporting would have to be absorbed by the county. All positions have been shown as full-time positions. For example, the listing of 1.5 Senior Account Clerks actually represents 3 part-time positions. Keeping this in mind, there may be a need for further reductions in staff – this is an estimate.

The “Assumptions” section lists items that have not been considered in the projection of a $500,000 deficit to the county on their financial statement. Our calculations show that the CHHA Program is breaking even if not a little better than "breaking even". Items considered in our calculations include the “Year End Allocation” of fringe benefits which are estimated to be $500,000. This cost will remain with Public Health even if CHHA does not. As mentioned before, shared positions within the department which CHHA partially supports will remain with the department. The charge for rent and maintenance in the Human Services Center will not be reduced. The estimated cost is $120,000 annually. The cost of rent and utilities for satellite offices will also continue. Any reduction in cost by sub-letting or ending the lease contracts is not considered. The 2012 cost of the satellite space is about $42,000.

Page 2 of the handout shows the financial history of the CHHA Program. Looking at the numbers without the “Assumptions” it does project a county cost of approximately $500,000 since 2006.

The last two pages of the handout are histories of billable visits/hours for CHHA and LTHHCP for 2006 - 2010 and a history of staffing from 2006 to 2010 for the CHHA Program.
Mr. Akins stated this is the reason he decided to attend tonight’s meeting. He is here to try to obtain as much information as possible from both views of the CHHA’s cost to the county. These two different views are the reason the task force was put together. What was presented this evening is a completely different view from what was presented at the previous evening’s Board of Legislators meeting. Mr. Akins stated that the county government does not want to compete against the public. The county’s purpose is to encourage private enterprise.

Dr. Healy stated he felt an outside party should be brought in to review the CHHA Program. Ms. Hathaway explained she had also recommended that an independent auditor such as Jack Venesky be brought in so the decision would not be made by the task force entirely. Karen St. Hilaire has asked Ms. Hathaway to contact Mr. Venesky to ask him to give us a quote to provide this information.

Concern of how well a private enterprise would serve the people of St. Lawrence County was raised. Also raised was the lack of choice to our residents of the county.

Ms. Hathaway told the Board of the new legislation that passed last Thursday allowing new CHHAs to start up in whatever areas they wish. When that legislation passed, the value of our CHHA Program dropped considerably. Sales of CHHAs which were already in progress have stopped. Sales contracts contained a clause which stated that if this legislation passed the sales price would be cut in half. If a new CHHA opens in St. Lawrence County we would not be able to compete with it. The private CHHAs would be able to provide services much cheaper than we can. Their nurses do approximately six to seven visits per day, whereas our nurses are doing four in a 7-hour work day. Their nurses are paid on a per visit basis so many of them do their paperwork on their own time. I think we are at risk of being put out of business in three to five years. Another problem we will be working with is the change of reimbursement from Medicaid which will go into effect on April 1, 2012 with the start of the new Prospective Payment System.

Another problem the agency is facing is being unable to hire nurses. We require enough staff to provide the level of care needed by our patients. We also need enough nursing staff to provide our mandated programs. We’re currently refusing 25% of our referrals because we don’t have the staff to take them on caseload. When the department reaches the point where we’re unable to provide services, we’re mandated to call the State. The Board of Health needs to hear what is happening, the problems and concerns as they will have to approve any move to sell or close the CHHA Program along with the St. Lawrence County Board of Legislators.
The County is looking at several options which include: hiring more staff to keep the CHHA operating; sell the CHHA or gradually turning our clients over to another CHHA. The time frame of completion depends on what option the County chooses. If the decision is to sell, this could take up to 1 ½ years to complete and the value may be in the range of $50,000 - $100,000 depending on how healthy the program is. If we decide to gradually turn our clients over to another CHHA, the process could possibly be done in approximately six months. Ms. Hathaway went on to explain the process the department would have to go through to sell the program and also explained the effect it would have on the department as far as staffing is concerned. Another issue raised is that the task force needs to look at the effect selling the CHHA would have on the county. The remaining positions would be an added cost to the county in a budget that has no room for additional expenses. What do we need to do to keep the program at “even” if we have to retain the program for another year before anything becomes final?

A question was raised as to whether we could contract for nursing services. Ms. Hathaway explained that we can contract for Home Health Aides, therapists, etc. but the department must provide one sole service and nursing is it. She also explained she had a call into the State to see what we can and cannot do. When she receives a call back, she will email the information to the Board of Health and St. Lawrence County Board of Legislators.

The bottom line is that a clear recommendation needs to be made. Either the CHHA Program needs to be sold, transferred, or kept and made more efficient.

OLD BUSINESS

- **H1N1 Lawsuit Appeal**

  Ms. Hathaway explained to the Board that she and Mike Crowe, our county attorney, had to appear at court on November 17th. There was no resolution. Mr. Crowe now has to contact the state to find out if they wish to prepare an amicus brief in our support and also to ask the Board of Legislators if they wish to continue with this. If the answer is “Yes”, Mr. Crowe and Ms. Hathaway will have to go to Albany for the next court appearance.
• **Go Pink/Go Blue Main Street**

In October we conducted a Go Pink campaign for breast cancer awareness in which we worked in conjunction with our area hospitals. The State is asking us to Go Blue in March of 2012 for colorectal cancer awareness. We are working with the merchants on Main Street in Canton. We’re asking them to go blue in their store fronts and along the main street. Our Cancer Services Program is one of the top in the state and has received an award for such.

**NEW BUSINESS**

• **Security and Confidentiality Audit**

We received an audit from the State to audit our security and confidentiality practices regarding HIV/AIDS, STD, and TB. The audit went very well. We were allowed to order some free privacy screens and double locks for our file cabinets.

• **CSHCN Audit**

We had a Children with Special Health Care Needs (CSHCN) audit approximately one month ago. This program is funded by a grant from NYS. We discontinued our Physically Handicapped Children Program so this program has become very important for identifying services for children with disabilities. This audit was successful.

• **Flu Clinics and PODs**

Our numbers of attendees at our flu clinics and PODs have been greatly reduced mainly due to vaccine being offered at the pharmacies. We have just placed our advance order for flu vaccine for next year. The order was half compared to this year’s. We have vaccinated approximately 800 people using our purchased vaccine and approximately 350 with our free vaccine received from the State. The free vaccine was used to inoculate our county employees as well as a free public POD.

**PERSONNEL**

• **Losses and Gains**

This discussion was moved to Executive Session.
OTHER

No discussion.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Mr. Bunstone made a motion that the Board go into executive session at 7:08 pm. The motion was seconded by Dr. Monroe. Dr. Healey made a motion to adjourn the executive session at 7:46 pm and the motion was seconded by Mr. Kimmès. The meeting was adjourned at 7:46 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rosemary A. Brown
Administrative Assistant