



# HUMAN SERVICES & VETERANS COMMITTEE

## COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Thursday, December 16, 2021

5:30 PM

Sullivan Chamber

### Call to Order

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Marc C. McGovern	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Alanna Mallon	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
E. Denise Simmons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Patricia Nolan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Timothy Toomey	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

The Human Services and Veterans Committee held a public hearing on Thursday, December 16, 2021, to receive a report from the Department of Human Services Programs regarding changes made to DHSP after school programs.

Present via Zoom were Councillor McGovern, Chair of the Committee, Vice Mayor Mallon, Councillor Nolan, Councillor Toomey, Mayor Siddiqui, Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler, Councillor Zondervan, Louis DePasquale, City Manager, James Maloney, Chief Operating Office, Cambridge Public Schools (CPS), Ellen Semonoff, Assistant City Manager, Michelle Farnum, Assistant Director of Children, Youth and Families, Khari Milner, Co-Director for the Agenda for Children, Department of Human Service Programs (DHSP), Lee Gianetti, Director of Communications and Community Relations, Dan Totten, Aide to Councillor Zondervan, Lori Murray, City Clerk's Office, and Paula M. Crane, Deputy City Clerk.

Also present via Zoom were Emie Michaud Weinstock, Juliet Simpson, Rachel Grashow, Sage Carbone, Gerardo Carcamo, Gilli Rosenweig and Maya Gonzalez.

Councillor McGovern convened the hearing and read the Call of the Meeting and the Governor's Executive Order regarding remote participation. He requested a Roll Call to indicate a quorum for the hearing.

The roll was called and resulted as follows:

PRESENT: Councillor McGovern, Vice Mayor Mallon, Councillor Nolan, Councillor Toomey -4

ABSENT: Councillor Simmons -1

A quorum was present.

Councillor McGovern stated that the Committee received two written communications which will be made part of the record (**ATTACHMENTS A & B**).

Councillor McGovern introduced Ms. Semonoff.

Ms. Semonoff stated that DHSP made a number of mistakes along the way in the process that caused distress to families. She said that the goal was to provide equitable access to programs and that was the right goal. She stated that they were able to triple the number of low-income families served in community school programs but there were many ways that the implementation of the process fell short. She stated that they tried to be clear that they recognize that, and they will work to do better but, in the end, some of the choices that were made were the right choices even as some of the things that were done fell short of what they wished they had been able to accomplish. She addressed one issue that has come up in some of the communication to the City Council that somehow on June 30, 2021, when the last Human Services and Veterans Committee meeting was held, DHSP was deliberately withholding information from the City Council or families. She said that was not the case. She said that whatever mistakes that were made, DHSP did not in any way try to withhold information. She said that at the meeting, DHSP was asked to address four specific issues that had come from families to the City Council. She said that the presentation was framed around those issues. She said that the first issue was would DHSP have the same capacity in its programs in September of 2021 that they had in the fall of 2019. She said that added to that was the issue of with an option for all who would need it. She said that is the way that the first issue was framed. She said that they indicated on that day that they were working diligently with the School Department to get back into all the spaces that DHSP had in the fall of 2019. She said that Mr. Maloney was working with DHSP and the principals to ensure that DHSP could have access to those spaces. She said that what was also acknowledged at the hearing was that pre-pandemic, there was inadequate capacity in the system to serve every family that wanted out of school time programming. She noted that there was inadequate capacity in City programs and in community programs. She said that in 2019 there was capacity for about 40% of elementary school students to be in a City or community program. She said that they described that day that there are systemic issues that are not unique to Cambridge which prevent most communities from being able to serve all young people whose families want them to access after school programs. She said that DHSP was clear on June 30<sup>th</sup> that there would not be enough capacity for every family that might want an after-school program. She explained that they also indicated that they were working hard to try to hire enough staff to be able to staff the programs when they opened in September. She said that close to the time of hearing on June 30, 2021, DHSP had just learned that they would be able to open all programs in the school in the fall in a manner similar to what was done in 2019. She said that the week after the hearing on June 30<sup>th</sup> they were opening summer programs and the way that they were opening them was extremely different from the way they have ever run programs before. They were run solely in pods with no staff or students move or combine in pods with limited access to cafeterias and gyms because at that time both the School Department and DHSP programs were operating under State rules as well as school rules that limited the way in which programs could be operated. She said that when they came to the June 30 hearing, they were just beginning to understand that they could operate all programs in the fall in a manner similar to the way that they were operated in the past. They had just finished operating a lottery for summer camp programs and just introduced a sliding fee scale for summer camp programs which was announced at that hearing. Ms. Semonoff said that they were prioritizing low-income families in their programs and that they would be doing that in fall. She said that the critical piece is that DHSP did not know on June 30<sup>th</sup> what their enrollment would look like, they didn't know what the process was, and they did not know what kind of lottery they would operate. She said that it was very challenging for DHSP and families that in June they were just beginning to figure out what needed to be done to be able to operate programs in December while just beginning the following week to operate DHSP's first programs in the schools since March of 2020. She said that for all the mistakes that were made, there was never an intention to mislead families. She said that information was never withheld about programs. She said that she also understands that what was intended and what was known did not change what the impact on families was of not learning whether their child would be in a program until way too late for that to be useful to families.

Ms. Semonoff and Michelle Farnum gave an overview of the PowerPoint presentation (**ATTACHMENT C**) titled "Community Schools 2021-2022-Program Changes, Data and Outcomes, Key Learnings".

Councillor McGovern thanked Ms. Semonoff and Ms. Farnum for the presentation and stated that at this time the Committee will hear Public Comment.

Rachel Grashow, 107 Rindge Avenue, acknowledged the staff for their report. She said that in that report she saw efforts to address the systemic inequalities such as elimination of scholarships, new fee structure, online instead of in-person enrollment, and an acknowledgement of pre-Covid and continued barriers to equity and inclusivity. She said that she would also like to see DHSP continue their focus on high quality programs and to incorporate community feedback into their next set of changes. She said that the report could serve as an important model for a dashboard that tracks who tried to enroll, who was enrolled, and who was denied enrollment to a DHSP program. She said that she is eager to see similar reports for youth centers, licensed after schools and other programs. She said that this type of data would allow DHSP to see the effects of their policy changes and outreach efforts. She said that DHSP clearly needs a vehicle for communication and feedback, specifically with and for families of color and low-income families. She said that the City Council has an important role to play in ensuring after school access to high priority families first, and ultimately all families in Cambridge. She stated that she wants the City Council to promote and prioritize equity and take responsibility for addressing the space, staffing, financial and interdepartmental divisions that get in the way of universal afterschool.

Juliet Simpson, 1 Brookline Place, thanked Councillor McGovern for arranging this meeting and City staff for the report. She said that one of the problems with the report is that it had a bunch of data but no explanation of why things happened, such as capacity increase at some schools and decrease in others. She said that it may be useful to put out an addendum with information that was not in the first version. She said that for next year, spaces should be increased for low and middle-income families because higher income families have resources to deal with childcare needs. She asked about next year. She stated that she may be able to find another afterschool program but apparently buses won't go to that afterschool program. She said that she will still need to work every day to take him to after school. She said that this is an important issue. She said she has lived in subsidized housing for 7 years in Cambridge and her door has never been knocked on to offer information. She said that she would be happy to try to improve outreach to families. She said that she does not believe that the City is hearing enough feedback from families.

Gerardo Alejandro Carcamo Oyarce, Putnam Avenue, stated that if his family had resources to have private care, they would have done so from the beginning. He said that he, and other parents, have sent detailed comments about the report to clarify misleading points and address things that were not mentioned in the report. He said that he is convinced that none of that matters. He said that low-income individuals are supposed to check all of the categories that are considered important. He said that it seems to him that DHSP is realizing the problems. He said that it is crucial to know when this was finalized. He said that he has the impression that this information could have been shared and mistakes could have been avoided. He said that he has no idea which families have been spoken to and there was no way to give feedback. There must be a system to allow that.

Emie Michaud Weinstock stated that she is encouraged by the time, energy and focus that is being given to this issue. She said that she is pleased with DHSP's focus on creating a Caregiver Advisory Group as well as identifying and seeking input about how caregivers of color and those who are impacted by low income can inform their decisions about spring, summer and fall programming. She said that with the passing of Policy Orders 207, 210 and 211, it appears that the City is looking to address and correct the huge disparities and imbalance of resource allocation within the out of school time ecosystem. She said that the DHSP report is a reflection of the City's efforts and she found it informative. She said that she hears the City Council discussing equity and seeking to uplift and serve the families most impacted by resource hoarding by privileged residents, however, she does not see a true commitment and action

needed to bring about racial and economic equity. She said that another area where the City Council has the opportunity to show its true commitment to racial equity is in its guidance to City departments in spending. To really show that it cares about equity, it should build in racial equity into its funding guidelines for department funding. She said that the City should issue an apology to families of color and of lower economic status for the way it has failed to move on these issues before now.

Councillor McGovern stated that there were no more public commenters signed up.

On a motion by Vice Mayor Mallon to close Public Comment, the roll was called and resulted as follows:

YEA:	Councillor McGovern, Vice Mayor Mallon, Councillor Nolan, Councillor Toomey	-4
ABSENT:	Councillor Simmons	-1

and Public Comment was closed.

Councillor McGovern opened the floor to comments from the Committee members.

Councillor Nolan asked if she heard that the number of applicants was about 1100. She said that one of the slides said that there were 1100 slots available and 350 community-based slots. She asked for an explanation. Michelle Farnum responded that the 1100 spots that they are talking about is what DHSP as a whole has available between community schools, licensed afterschool, youth centers and King Open Extended Day. Councillor Nolan asked why that wasn't sufficient if there had been 1100 applicants. Ms. Farnum said that was 1100 applicants to the Community School Program. Councillor Nolan asked how the 1100 applicants compares to the past. Ms. Farnum responded that is one of the changes in the lottery system. She explained that in having a lottery system, there is a time when you open, accept applications, and then have all of the applications. She said that the process that was used in the past for Community Schools is that they did not keep a waiting list because there was an open time in person to sign up and after a program was filled, that was it. They did not keep the waiting list. Because of that, they do not know how many people would have applied if they could have gotten there on the Thursday night but couldn't, and they don't know how many people who called the next week and were told that they were full and were not on a waiting list. What they do know because they saw minimally the number of 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> who applied, they never had that many 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> graders enrolled in DHSP programs. So at least DHSP knows that those families did not enroll in the past. What they do know about the enrollment number of lower-income families is that they never made it to sign up and were never even counted. Ms. Semonoff added that DHSP believes that having the requirement that you apply for a scholarship as opposed to the fee that you would pay based on income has influenced families.

Councillor Nolan said that we do not have the data to compare to the past. She said that she supports moving to a system that is more equitable and allows for a wider range of people. She said that she was happy to hear an apology from Ms. Semonoff. She asked how we can ensure that the communication element and turnaround time will be quicker to families. Ms. Semonoff responded that it is her hope and expectation that when a lottery is done again, they will have learned enough more for it to go more seamlessly. She said that there were three types of communication problems, and all are challenging. The first was that because the system sent out information differently than they entered it in some instances, there were problems in the first couple of days that were challenging when families got inconsistent information. She said that they worked with Mr. Maloney and accessed e-mail addresses from the school so that they could have communication with families. She said that they were communicating with every family in that regard. The second piece is families that e-mailed or called and said that they were told that

they had an enrollment slot, and they are struggling in one way or another. She said that DHSP reached out to those families. She said that the piece where they did not respond at all in a timely fashion were the families who complained that they did not get a slot in their programs. She said that there were e-mails that went unaddressed for a long time as DHSP struggled to deal with the families who knew that they had a slot. She said that the families who were understandably upset that they did not have a slot or were critical of the process were the e-mails that were not responded to in a timely fashion. She said that they did respond to families looking for information about the slot they had but they did fail to respond to families that were unhappy with the process.

Vice Mayor Mallon asked about buses that are transporting students from their schools to their after-school programs. She asked if the City is providing transportation to these afterschool programs. She said that it is her understanding that the City is not because of Covid restrictions and requirements. She asked if that is subject to change soon? Ms. Semonoff said that the schools made some changes in the busing routes, but she believes that families whose children went to afterschool programs that are less than one mile from the schools were not eligible for transportation. She said that this is true whether you are going to an afterschool program or home. She said that what happened is that when families were enrolling in a program other than one in the school where a child attends school, for some families the walk was 1/10<sup>th</sup> of a mile from their school to the afterschool program and there was not transportation because it does not conform to the overarching policy and buses were not available to do that. She stated that was a big piece of parents' concerns about transportation to afterschool. Vice Mayor Mallon asked if there is a different bus protocol this year than there has been in the past. Ms. Semonoff said that to her knowledge, the bus protocol has not changed.

Vice Mayor Mallon asked what DHSP is doing, or planning to do, via a caregiver survey or a feedback mechanism to enable program participants and caregivers whose families did not get a spot to offer feedback. Ms. Farnum responded that in addition to families who are not part of a program, DHSP wants to uplift black and brown families and the voices of low-income people who do not typically have access to providing feedback. She said that it will not be just a survey. They are looking at the possibility of a focus group or other way to reach families that do not typically come out or have access.

As it relates to the Caregiver Advisory Group, Vice Mayor Mallon asked what works and steps are being put into place to think about that and when might the City Council expect something to happen. Ms. Semonoff responded that DHSP has been working with both Rachel Grashow and Emie Michaud Weinstock in looking at the development of a Caregiver Advisory Group and what that could look like. She added that the thinking is that the actual time to create the kind of Caregiver Advisory Group that would be most beneficial would take longer than what may be useful to gather some information for our immediate need for decision making. She said that they are looking at how to create a robust and meaningful Caregiver Advisory Group. She said that in order to do that, it takes time. She said that they are working on the question of how, in the meantime, we can do meaningful engagement with families around decisions. For example, the summer decisions are going to need to be made fairly quickly in order for DHSP to move forward and therefore, what can we do in the meantime to engage meaningfully with a cross section of families to be able to help guide decision making. Vice Mayor Mallon said that early communication and clear communication is key.

Councillor Zondervan said that he would like to review two Policy Orders that the City Council passed this term. He said that one in October asked the City Manager to present a plan, including funding, to provide children or city youth programs for rapidly expanding out of school time in the city to create enough slots for all families who need it. Additionally, there was a Policy Order asking for the Caregiver Advisory Group to be created. He said that he is not hearing anything that is addressing these Policy Orders. He asked when will the City Council see a plan that will give them confidence that the City will provide out of school time services to all the families who need it. Ms. Semonoff responded that she does

not know that it is realistic to think that there will be a plan immediately to expand. She said that she understands the deep desire for expansion, but when thinking about capacity of the community programs and the buildings that they operate out of, the process must engage the schools and community partners. She said that the Agenda for Children, which has been a leader in convening the City and community programs, is a school and City partnership. She said that she cannot say that in September of 2022 they are suddenly going to have 500 more seats for elementary school students for out of school time. Councillor Zondervan said that it is profoundly disappointing and mind-boggling to him. He said that we have \$80 million from the federal government in Covid relief funds, and we still cannot find a way to solve this problem.

Councillor McGovern acknowledged all of the families that had a hard time with changes that took place and some of the missteps that happened. He said that no one feels good about the stress that families felt. He said that a question that he received most that was on everyone's list was how we get to a point where anyone who wants a place in after school can get it. He said that clearly if 3,500 kids needed to be served in afterschool in Cambridge, he does not believe this could be done even in the best of circumstances. He said that we can certainly do better than 40% over time. He said that he wants to see a plan. He said that he appreciates the obstacles, but people would understand and feel better if there was a roadmap regarding how to increase capacity of afterschool programs and how to get there in the next couple of years. He said that he wants to work towards such a roadmap. He said that the City has plans for many different things that look over the course of the next 3-5 years with steps to address needs. Councillor McGovern asked where our non-profit and out of school time partners fit into this conversation. He asked how the City can help them to create more opportunity to serve more children. Mr. Milner said that the Agenda for Children works with many community-based programs, longstanding 100+ providers in the community, non-profits, and more specialized programs. He said that it is a vast set of services that he is talking about. He said that capacity is often focused on the early elementary years where the rub is the number of applicants versus the number of slots available. He said that as they have learned that often, as the kids get older, a lot of families either make a choice or there are other factors that contribute to caregivers not enrolling their children. He said that there needs to be a plan for any strategy that would be rolled out. He said that this plan should begin in the early elementary years. He said that the Agenda for Children has, and will continue to, look for creative ways to leverage City and school resources. He said that this is a time for the City to explore and try different ways to be innovative in building capacity and how to subsidize and support capacity for both community-based and City programs alike. He noted that the schools are a huge partner in many ways. He said that there is a shared agreement that the outcomes for young people are tied to not only what they do in school, but what they do out of school. He said that there are spaces in schools that could be explored with a plan. He said that could be a City provider or community provider, for which they have examples of both in schools. He said that staffing continues to be an issue. He said that the planning is something that we do have control over, and we should continue to do it. Ms. Semonoff said that she does believe that planning needs to be done. She said that she did not mean to give the impression that the City should not. She said that she is trying to be realistic about the likelihood that they would be able to do a quick, significant expansion. She said that last year the City funded over \$250,000 to four of the not-for-profits to ensure that the students that the schools were most worried about who were in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade and who could not be in person in the beginning of Covid, the City was funding those slots. She said that schools funded slots this summer and the City is continuing this year for the high need students identified by the schools to continue to pay for a full scholarship for them to a community afterschool program. She said that the report recommended that there be a city/school/family process. Mr. Milner said that for many years, when they have seen the numbers in any program out of balance in terms of who is being served or who is being served fast, often another part of the system will pick up the slack to help those families. He said that the Agenda for Children will continue to stay focused to think about what can be done to build capacity and equitable access. He said that DHSP took big steps and took some risks and when you take a risk, you may inflict some discomfort.

He said that naming it and owning it the important first step to figure out what can be done to build capacity.

Councillor McGovern said that from the feedback he has received, he did not hear from anyone that did not understand or support the change to increase enrollment for lower income students. He said that the issue was the timing. He said that at the very least, if we have to deliver news to people it should be done in a timely fashion. He added that he feels at times that we get too territorial about things. For example, there are more students in the public schools during the day than would be in an afterschool program. Yet we say we cannot use some classrooms. He said that these are our kids and our money. He said that we talk about space but acknowledged that there is space, and we need to better use that space. He talked about school transportation and the issues that were caused by the policy regarding distance from their schools to their afterschool programs. He said that we must be more collective.

Councillor McGovern said that regarding staffing, how are we thinking creatively in how to solve this problem. He suggested the potential of graduate or high school students to fill staff positions. He said that it is enough to put a job posting on the web page. Ms. Farnum said that DHSP has done campaigns at local universities and have gone on-campus to conduct outreach. She said that this outreach has been interrupted due to Covid. She said that DHSP is having a difficult time staffing their program so therefore, staff does not have time to go out and doing recruiting. She said that they did raise the salaries of part-time staff this summer. She said that they went to the City and asked if they could give staff retention bonuses for anyone who committed to work for DHSP for the school year would get a retention bonus. She said that they are successful at hiring staff, but they are losing staff as well. She said that just when they are at a place where they feel fully staffed, they lose staff. She said that they are not yet at a place where they are ready to expand because they are not meeting basic needs right now. She said that with the rise in Covid numbers, when staff is sick or there has been an exposure, they are down staff.

Councillor McGovern said that he had a conversation with Riverside and not only have their referrals gone through the roof because mental health has been impacted by Covid, they have lost a lot of staff so there is a double whammy wherein more people need services and there are fewer people to provide those services. He added that there are large retail vacancies in the City. He asked if the City could explore a ten-year lease to renovate and provide classrooms in those spaces. He said that we need to think outside the box.

Regarding priorities and who gets slots, Councillor McGovern said that we have talked about low-income students and, but he asked how children with special needs fit into the equation. Ms. Farnum said that it very well could be. She said that DHSP began with low-income students as a priority is because they were underrepresented in DHSP programs. They did not see children from low-income families reflected in the programs. She said that there is an inclusion initiative as part of DHSP for many years and over the course of the years, more students with special needs are represented. She said that when they look at a program, they want to ensure that enrollment is on par with what the community looks like.

Councillor McGovern said that as it relates to reaching out to subsidized housing residents, does the City reach out to Inclusionary Zoning residents and other residents across the City that are living in subsidized housing that are not the CHA buildings. Ms. Semonoff said that door-to-door outreach was not limited just to Cambridge Housing Authority related buildings.

Councillor Nolan said if outreach is not effective, we have to re-think it. She asked if the City is working with other parts of the City such as families that opt out of Cambridge Public Schools. As it relates to the question of defining the cutoffs for a family making a certain amount of money, she encouraged all to think of how the City can ensure that the working class in the City are served. She encouraged everyone

to keep the goal in mind of getting more spots for more kids. She said that if we can solve the staffing problem, we should be able to solve the space problem.

Councillor McGovern thanked all those present for their attendance.

Councillor Toomey made a motion to adjourn the hearing.

The roll was called and resulted as follows:

YEA:	Councillor McGovern, Vice Mayor Mallon, Councillor Nolan, Councillor Toomey	-4
ABSENT:	Councillor Simmons	-1

and the hearing was adjourned at 7:32 p.m.

For the Committee,

---

Councillor Marc McGovern, Chair  
Human Services and Veterans Committee

**A communication was received from Gerardo Carcamo, Evelyn Aviles and Juliet Simpson, regarding the recent DHSP report.**

**Sundry communications were received, regarding the recent DHSP report.**

**A communication was received from the Department of Human Services, transmitting a presentation on Community Schools 2021-2022 Program Changes, Data and Outcomes, Key Learnings.**