

## Morelle expects to hold poverty forum in March



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(Photo: File photo)

A month after a coalition to radically change how Rochester deals with its intractable poverty was announced, the point man said he's working on a forum so residents can share their ideas as well as learn about the group's timetable and how it will measure progress.

State Assembly Majority Leader Joseph Morelle, D-Irondequoit, said he'd like to get the Rochester-Monroe County Anti-Poverty Task Initiative, representatives of state agencies that make up Gov. Andrew Cuomo's Rochester Anti-Poverty Task Force and the community together for a conversation in March.

The meeting would invite the public into the anti-poverty action that was included in Cuomo's State of the State address in January.

"This whole process will be informed by the voice of those who are living the experience now and those who have lived it," Peter Carpino, president and chief executive officer of the United Way of Greater Rochester, said in a separate interview.

Since the concerted effort on poverty was announced, the ensuing weeks had been spent devising a structure for a coalition that seems as complex as the problem it is trying to solve.

"I think we're making progress on how to organize this," Morelle said. "We're a little bit in formation."

The Rochester-Monroe County Anti-Poverty Task Initiative has more than 60 public, private and non-profit agencies and organizations organized by Morelle, Carpino, Rochester Mayor Lovely Warren and Monroe County Executive Maggie Brooks.

But it's only part of the equation.

The other is the Rochester Anti-Poverty Task Force, part of Cuomo's 10-point anti-poverty Opportunity Agenda. This group includes representatives from 20 state departments such as health, economic development, mental health, agriculture and markets, aging, developmental disabilities and prevention of domestic violence. The task force has not committed any money to Rochester's effort.

Carpino acknowledged public confusion about each one's role.

"The governor's task force is a standalone group that is being formed to advise and assist in Rochester's local effort," he said. "They will not make decisions for the local effort. I think that's important. ... At the end of the day, the state can't do this work for us. Only we can do this work."

About one-third of city residents live in poverty, according to a report from the [Rochester Area Community Foundation and its ACT Rochester initiative](#)

</story/news/2015/01/08/rochester-poverty-act-community-foundation-report/21452093/>). Among benchmark cities nationwide, Rochester is the only one with more than half of its children in poverty.

The governor's office became involved [\(/story/news/2015/01/19/request-state-funds-led-anti-poverty-task-force/22022943/\)](/story/news/2015/01/19/request-state-funds-led-anti-poverty-task-force/22022943/) in Rochester's anti-poverty efforts after Morelle and Carpino made a request about a year ago for funding for a United Way program. After being instructed to come up with a bigger, bolder idea, Morelle and Carpino several months ago convened an array of community organizations.

They submitted a proposal to Cuomo in December (<http://roc.democratandchronicle.com/assets/pdf/A2223513212.PDF>). Morelle and Carpino both said the 11-page document was a concept, which outlined in broad strokes the system, program and policy obstacles to progress in five areas — jobs, health and nutrition, education and workforce training, housing and safe neighborhoods.

The concept focuses on children and helps them by including their parents, grandparents or caretakers, said Jennifer Leonard, president and chief executive officer of the Rochester Area Community Foundation.

She said the framework is there to make financial stability a reality.

"It's going to take a lot of work to find that place between what hasn't worked but we do well and know how to do, and what we need to do and need to learn how to do together," she said. "That's ambitious. I think this situation warrants a communitywide ambition to stretch ourselves right out of our comfort zone and change the way we work in this community."

The concept paper gave examples of things that don't work as well as they could: nutrition programs at senior centers and after-school programs that don't allow families to eat together; and the complete loss of child-care subsidies for minimal raises.

Morelle explained the goal is to create a system that looks at everything affecting an individual's circumstances.

"No one has a single problem," Morelle said. "I don't mean to trivialize it, but if somebody just had a housing problem but was educated and had a job and had day care and had transportation, this would be easy to solve. It's not because people have a whole host of complicating factors in their lives."

Such a comprehensive approach makes sense to Bill Guche, a 77-year-old retired businessman from Perinton.

"You have to look at all the factors," he said. "We've allowed this poverty issue to consume us and we've not corrected it. We really are not addressing the cause of poverty. We address the symptoms. ... We don't take a very goal-oriented position on solving it."

Carpino said the local group is developing a timeline of objectives and progress.

"People don't want to hear about what we're doing," he said. "They want results."

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