

COUNTY OF



ALLEGHENY

SARA INNAMORATO
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

**Mental Health/Intellectual Disability Advisory Board
Meeting Minutes
Microsoft Teams
Tuesday, May 13, 2025**

Present:

Board members: David Forsyth, Aeisha Carter, Debbie Jozwiak, Ken-Netta Fowlkes, Donnesha Slider, Keirston Parham, Nev Jones, Vanessa Dodds, Rachel Flinner

DHS Staff: Cameron Judge, OBH Family Support Coordinator; Brenda Bulkoski, Director of ODS; Jewel Denne, Assistant Director, Bureau of Mental Health, OBH; Colleen Sokira, OBH Special Projects Manager; Sarah Bigelow, OBH Special Projects Assistant; Kathryn Collins, ATP Chief Analytics Officer

Other Attendees: Hal Foster, Venuri Siriwardane, Lauren Stoner, Sharnay Hearn; Jeff Long, CCBH Adult Program Manager

I. Introductions and Attendance

Colleen Sokira called the meeting to order at 4:33 pm.

- a. Introductions
 - i. This is the first meeting of the newly appointed advisory board
- b. Govenda
 - i. All board members should have received an email to log into Govenda, which is the board recordkeeping system used by DHS
 - a.If you are having trouble getting in, please email Colleen or drop a message in the chat
 - ii. Includes agendas, meeting minutes, and bylaws for purposes of the PA Sunshine Act
 - a.In addition to Govenda, this information is also publicly published on the [DHS website](#)
 - b.Final agendas must be finalized 5 business days before we meet and posted 4 days before
- c. Schedule
 - i. Remaining meetings for the year
 - a. July 8
 - b. September 19
 - c. November 11

ERIN DALTON, DIRECTOR
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1. DF pointed out that this meeting falls on Veterans Day
- ii. Other schedule logistics
 - a. The future Executive Board can opt to change these dates once elected
 - b. Currently meeting via Teams – would an in-person meeting better meet the needs of this group for any meetings?
 1. CS would recommend against hybrid meetings due to technological challenges that previous attempts have seen
 - c. Please send CS an email if you would like an email/phone list distributed among board members
 1. **Question (VD):** Can you send this question out as a survey, so we don't flood your email?
 2. **Answer (CS):** Yes, then we can discuss this at the next (July) meeting
- d. Leadership Structure
 - i. Executive Committee Structure
 - a. The board's officers are its Chair and Vice Chair
 - b. The executive committee includes these two officers and three additional board members
 - ii. Current bylaw structure
 - a. Officers shall consist of a Chair and a Vice Chair.
 1. **The Nominating Committee shall make nominations of candidates to the above offices.** Board members present at the Officer Election Meeting may make additional nominations.
 2. **Election of Officers** shall take place by a simple majority vote of the members present and voting at the Officer Election Meeting.
 3. **The Term of Office** for the officers and the three members of the Executive Committee shall be two years.
 4. **Elections shall take place** during the November meeting, and roles will start at the following meeting
 - iii. Motion by DF to discuss temporarily amending the bylaws
 - a. Seconded by VD
 - iv. Points of discussion
 - a. NJ - Nomination vs self-nomination
 1. CS - Interpretation of the current bylaws allows for both
 - b. NJ - Parity between MH and ID side
 1. CS - Currently, the board has that power implicitly based on who they choose to nominate and vote for, but it is important to recognize those overlaps between these fields
 - v. Vote to amend the bylaws temporarily

a. 8 vote yea

b. 0 vote nay

c. Motion passes – the board will make nominations this evening

vi. Election date and length of term

a. DF makes a motion to hold elections in July 2025 and amend the term to a 12-month term

1. Seconded by NJ

b. **Question:** If we hold elections in July, would we then amend our bylaws to make July our new election month?

1. **Answer (CS):** You could either amend the bylaws completely over the next year, including the voting provisions, or do another temporary

c. VD – in favor of a 12-month term with bylaw revision before June 2026

d. NJ – agree that it is a chicken and the egg situation – it's hard to elect an executive committee when board members are still getting to know each other

e. RF – Agree that it will be hard to vote when members are still trying to get to know each other

1. Is there any way to establish a 4–6-month interim leadership group?

f. DS – propose that we keep July 2026

1. Board members can use that time to get to know each other and trust that whoever is elected will do a good job, based on being selected for this board

2. Honor the structure and make changes if needed

g. NJ – would feel more comfortable if the board could wait to nominate and elect until members know each other better and have a chance to understand the bylaws better

h. DF – with 11 board members, 5 of them will be on the Executive Committee – we need leadership so we can start, rather than running the calendar more

1. Would like an agreement that one goal of the leadership team immediately should be to create a subcommittee to amend the bylaws with a deadline

i. VD – yes, hearing NJ's concerns, but also echo DF and DS's desire to elect leadership

j. Vote to temporarily amend the election date and length of term

1. 8 vote yea

2. 1 abstain

3. Motion passes – will nominate tonight to vote at the July meeting

- vii. The direction and discussion of this board should not be made by DHS – it should be made by the board members
 - a. It's up to the board to decide what the practical way is for the board to do this

II. Office Updates

- a. ODS – presented by BB
 - i. Renewed activity from families who care for individuals with ID/Autism and complex needs – needs that need to be met through the MH system
 - 1. Finding it difficult to access community supports as they transition to adulthood
 - 2. The Provider Alliance is holding an upcoming listening session on Friday from 10:30 – 11:30
 - a. Those interested can register at the [following link](#)
 - b. BB will share the link over email to Board members
 - 3. Pressures on providers to engage in performance-based contracting have a role in this increased concern and advocacy
 - ii. Either in the July or September meeting – would like to have [the START \(Systemic Treatment and Resources\) Allegheny](#) team come present
 - 1. Will have been active for a little over a year by the September meeting – be able to share data
 - 2. Funded through a State grant
 - 3. PA START Allegheny is a specialized mental health support service for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and behavioral health needs
 - iii. Has been discussing with Jewel how to make the reports more interactive for board members
 - 1. Will share what Board members need, but also want to know what Board members want to hear
 - 2. Watch your emails in the next couple of weeks for a brief survey related to this topic
- b. OBH – Bureau of Mental Health – presented by JD
 - i. Increasing LTSR beds by 20%
 - 1. [RFP earlier this year](#) – currently reviewing proposals
 - a. Targets two specialty populations
 - i. Women in ACJ waiting for competency restoration at Torrance
 - ii. Individuals dually diagnosed with ID and MI

1. County data showed that there was an increasing number of individuals in this population getting “stuck” in ACJ and no facility with the expertise available to provide care in either the ID or MH system
 2. Approached the State to ask for the dollars available due to an ACLU lawsuit regarding the length of stay in jail
- ii. Mobile Competency Restoration is now online
- iii. Looking at what access to MH care means and what the county can do to address access issues
 1. Will be focusing heavily on hours of care in particular – more than M-F, 9-5
 - a. Especially for preventive care
- iv. First class of [Behavioral Health Fellows](#) recently graduated
 1. Was able to start with support from the State, and due to excess dollars during the height of COVID
 2. This program has allowed the county to invest in the behavioral healthcare workforce, particularly in service areas with high waitlists and large staff vacancies
 3. Provides
 - a. 2-year professional development cohort
 - b. Higher wages and loan repayment
 - c. Retain and recruit a robust workforce
 4. Able to reinvest in the program for an additional 6 cohorts
- v. **Question (NJ):** Was hoping there would be some updates and discussion about Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) – is that possible?
 1. **Answer:** Yes, we are exploring AOT and currently engaging with stakeholders
 - a. Opting out for this year and exploring the feasibility of implementing
 - b. Another reason excited to have this new board – help us understand who to engage with and provide guidance
- vi. **Question (NJ):** The scope of the board is to review annual plans for the county and help to develop them. This implies that a more robust role was originally envisioned by the legislature. Given the controversial nature of AOT, when it’s not discussed with the board first, is it something that there’s no precedent for? I personally have deep concerns, as some may have seen in the [Public Source article](#), and transparency concerns, and recommend all board members read the article. It brings me great concern

in terms of what our role is as board members. I personally don't want to be a member of something where the role is rubber stamping when I am a researcher and have deep content expertise, and am also concerned about the lack of. I was hoping there would be more discussion when something this controversial happens and is reported on. If we wait until July to discuss more, then more decisions may be made by the county. How do we, as a Board, have a robust role in this?

1. **Answer (JD):** Appreciate your comment and think that there is an opportunity for DHS to engage individuals before the July board meeting. If there is anyone you think we should talk to, including any board members, please let us know. AOT aside, this is a conversation that Brenda and I had – we don't want a Board we come and bring updates to. We want to talk about strategic planning. The board is purposeful, and it took us some time to identify who should be on the board – we want your input and expertise on these critical and difficult decisions. We're all here to do the best we can for individuals and not to do harm.
 2. **Answer (KC):** Also happy to come to the July meeting and present more about AOT. Would recommend or value in terms of what the Board recommends in terms of robust feedback. We welcome your feedback and expertise as we're thinking about this, whatever it looks like. Also happy for Director Dalton to come and give an update.
- vii. **Comment (NJ):** Do want to add that if I hadn't brought it up, we wouldn't have talked about it today. The board can't respond to things if we don't know they're happening. Even with repeatedly flagging it, it has been very difficult to get any information about it over the past year. If we don't have information as a board, we can't provide feedback or respond.

Perhaps a comprehensive plan – which is mentioned in the statute – would help board members flag issues with a more appropriate time to address them.

Hope to realize transparency and substantive democratic governance through this board

1. **Response (JD):** Would you like us to put something on the calendar for July?
 - a. **NJ:** Yes, would also be good to have Erin present her vision for public engagement and communication and accountability to impacted communities. Experience in

participatory research and planning – important for leadership to be engaged in boards like this

To fellow members – perhaps an ad hoc committee for AOT since it's too in-depth an issue to be discussed at a superficial level?

2. **DS:** Not just transparency, but would love to understand the use of content experts and how they're used to help make decisions. As a provider, there's a difference between what by law someone can provide versus medical ethics.

For example, outpatient commitments already exist separate from AOT but “lack teeth”. “What's the point of making a change if it comes to the same outcome?”

Response (KC): Open to feedback from you all, in whatever format to get feedback from the board and others

3. **NS:** put in Teams Chat purview and scope of MH/ID board, per state statute (copied below)
 - a. "To develop, together with the administrator, annual plans for the mental health and intellectual disability programs required by sections 301 and 509."
 - b. "To review performance under the mental health and intellectual disability program and to recommend a system of program evaluation."
 - c. Would like to see the potential of this scope realized and would like to do more than provide “peripheral” feedback and engage fully with developing annual plans
4. **VD:** would like to see a comprehensive report about what the county's doing in MH and ID 2 weeks before the meeting to better understand what's going on and come to the meetings informed

III. Nominations

- a. Chair

- i. Donnesha Slider

1. **Question (NJ):** Can you speak to how your role with the county may impact your role as chair, if elected?
 - a. **Answer:** I'm a consultant to the county. I will call that out, and I am not affiliated with any institution and am instead affiliated with my patients. I think that part of the reason I

was asked to apply for this board is because I'm willing to ask the hard questions.

ii. David Forsyth

1. Background

a. 50 years in the nuclear industry – leadership ability and working under pressure

2. This board needs to be very proactive and engaged in what it does over the next 12 months – we're all here to help a group of people that need a lot of help, and we all need to row in the same direction

iii. Vanessa Dodds

1. ID advocate and work history in executive leadership

b. Vice Chair

i. Nev Jones

ii. Debbie

iii. David Forsyth

c. **Note:** It is 6 pm and board member KP has to leave due to a prior commitment

i. Colleen will send updates to KP and any other members who have to leave early due to reaching our scheduled end time

d. Executive Committee Members

i. Nev Jones

ii. Donnesha Slider

iii. David Forsyth

iv. Rachel Flinner

v. Vanessa Dodds

vi. Aiesha Carter

vii. Debbie Jozwiak

viii. Colleen will check with members who were not able to be here tonight to see if they are interested in being nominated, because NJ wished to nominate all current board members

e. Questions

i. **Question (NJ):** How is the voting going to work?

1. **Answer (CS):** The voting form will be sent out over email, and you'll log into Govenda. Since it's three different positions, you'll be presented with three different pages. For the D&A planning council, there were members nominated for multiple positions.

ii. **Question (DJ):** or subcommittees, how will that structure work?

1. **Answer (CS):** Based on current recollection of the bylaws – the elected chair can appoint members to additional subcommittees

2. **VD:** Typically, at least one Executive Committee member will be on each subcommittee based on past experiences with other boards

- a. **CS:** checked, and this is not currently required by the bylaws
- iii. **Question (NJ):** If understanding correctly, the bylaws could be amended to increase the number of members on the executive committee, in the interest of horizontal leadership. Would not want to see anyone excluded from critical decision-making due to mandated size.
 - 1. **Answer (CS):** One part of the role of the Executive Committee, per the bylaws, is that if, for some reason, the board needs to be reached quickly, a smaller group is easier. Yes, the bylaws can be amended by new leadership.
- iv. **DS:** Importance of including a parent or family member in leadership
- v. **Question (NJ):** Could we all have bios sent around before the votes?
 - 1. **Answer (CS):** Yes, we can do that
 - 2. Please send Colleen a bio statement (~200 words max), and she and Sarah will combine that into one document at least 2 weeks before the next meeting
- f. Voting will take place on July 8 and will open that morning at 10:00 am
 - i. Please vote by 4:30 – but DHS staff will be able to support if you come to the meeting and have had tech problems with voting via Govenda
 - ii. We can only accept votes from members who are **present** at the July 8 meeting, so even if you vote online, you still need to come to the meeting that night for your vote to count
- g. **Question (NJ):** Would it be possible to motion for an expansion of the Executive Committee at the July meeting?
 - i. **Answer (CS):** Yes, it would be possible to present that motion before votes are counted at the July meeting.

IV. New Business

- a. **DS:** The bylaws need to be updated
 - i. [General agreement from the board]
- b. **Question (NJ):** If AOT is truly going to begin in September, that's very close to our July election. Is there a way we could look into forming ad hoc committees before the election?
 - i. **Answer (CS):** Per the bylaws, forming ad hoc committees requires elected leadership.
 - ii. **Follow up (NJ):** Given that the county is out of compliance with state statute, is there not a way to find a temporary solution?
 - 1. **Answer (CS):** We would need to do that tonight, during the meeting. We do currently have a quorum.

- c. **Motion by NJ** to form ad hoc committees on time-sensitive issues as a whole board in the interim period without board leadership.
- d. **Question (DF):** When is AOT slated to start?
 - i. September 1, 2025, given NJ's understanding
 - ii. **Answer (JD):** Every year, each county in PA has to opt **out** of AOT. This year, Erin Dalton's letter to the state stated that we were looking to explore and implement, possibly starting in the fall. September is not definitive, but it is what DHS is currently aiming for
- e. **Question:** Is there any public comment period currently planned?
 - i. **Answer (JD):** There have been some meetings with stakeholders, but we look forward to your suggestions on how to engage
 - ii. **NJ:** Without insider knowledge, there would be no indication that this is happening and no opportunity to comment
 - iii. **DF:** Struggling to understand the timeline. Is the intention to have public comment and implement by September 1?
 - 1. **Answer (JD):** No, DHS has been engaging stakeholders and is still in the exploratory phase. September 1 is the date that was in the letter sent to the state, but as stated in the interview with Public Source, that date is not definitive
- f. **NJ:** Pressure is working, but needs to be kept up, given the time-sensitive nature in order to find out what's happening and how decisions are being made, which is why board members should engage with this before July
- g. **Note:** Due to time, there is no longer a quorum – only 5 board members are still present
- h. **NJ:** Now that Public Source has made this public, we can move forward with a grassroots movement for accountability and publicity
 - i. Would have preferred for the MH/ID board, given its statutory mandate, to also be able to weigh in, but understand that the new board is still too recently appointed at this point
- i. **JD:** Becomes an agenda item for July at this point to do some more level setting about the role of the Board and AOT
 - i. **DF:** would request from Jewel a more definitive schedule on AOT rollout so the Board can have a better timeline for providing feedback of their own and soliciting feedback
 - 1. **DS:** Please include information on stakeholders, research, content experts used, and plans for the pilot study before implementation
 - a. **JD:** Yes, will take back to Erin
 - 2. **DF:** If the scheduling is such that we need to move the July meeting earlier, even into June, please let the Board know

- j. **Question (RF):** Are there any other programs that the county has to opt out of annually?
 - i. **Answer (JD):** No, not that I'm aware of, but I can confirm
 - ii. **RF:** would also want to discuss what the other options are, when considering whether to adopt one program or another
 - 1. Also wants to understand if there's a separate funding pool if AOT is drawing from
- k. **NJ:** At the next meeting, I really want to talk about what the vision for the board is
 - i. Also, checked the bylaws, and the board is allowed to meet monthly
 - ii. Whole world of options when building a system of care for folks with long-term SMI - "what do we do to fix a broken system?"

V. Public Comment

- a. None

VI. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:57

VII. Next Public Meeting

The next public MH/ID Advisory Board meeting will be on **Tuesday, July 8**, from 4:30 – 6:00 p.m. on Microsoft Teams.

Colleen Sokira will send out the Teams invite for this meeting the week before. There is also a link posted on the [DHS advisory board webpage](#).