

COUNTY OF



ALLEGHENY

**Mental Health/Intellectual Disability Advisory Board  
Meeting Minutes  
Microsoft Teams  
Tuesday, January 14, 2025**

**Present:** David Forsyth, Elizabeth Jachim, Emperatris Carter, Nev Jones, Kimberly Mathos, Rachel Flinner, Colleen Sokira, OBH Special Projects Manager; Sarah Bigelow, OBH Special Projects Assistant

**I. Introductions and Attendance**

Colleen Sokira Called the meeting to order at 4:33 p.m.

Attendees introduced themselves and what brought them to the meeting.

Applications for the board who were selected to be moved forward to County Council should have received an email from Colleen late last week. It included a request to make sure DHS has your up-to-date phone number, email, and resume. If you don't have a resume, we are happy to help you create one or draft a letter explaining why you do not have one. A one-page resume is fine. These items are required to move forward to County Council. We are hoping to get these by the end of this week to get your applications on County Council's February or March schedules. You will need to attend the Council's committee meeting either virtually or in person. You do not have to attend the full council vote.

Earlier this week, DHS updated its [Allegheny Analytics website](#). We wanted you to be aware of this update so you can use and share this information. You can use this website to see some of the data that DHS has access to and uses. Some dashboards that may be of interest include [Mental Health Crisis Service Trends](#) and [Improving Access to Mental Health Services for Adult Medicaid Patients](#).

**II. Office Updates**

- i. ODS
  - i. No updates tonight due to staff conflicts
- ii. OBH
  - i. No updates tonight due to staff illnesses

### III. Announcements, Questions, and Public Comments

**Question:** Is there any background reading we can do on the history of the MH/ID board?

**Answer:** We can send the [bylaws](#), which are also publicly available. They also reference the state law and the part of the Mental Health Procedures Act that require this board.

Additionally, the [DHS webpage](#) hosts previous minutes and agendas for approximately a year and a half. The hope is that once the new board is assigned, the board will vote for new leadership. Once that group is elected, they will meet about one month before each board meeting to plan the board meetings.

**Questions:** The purview of the board has the possibility to be pretty wide and has been mandated since the 60s. Are there any records going further back?

**Answer:** Not that any DHS staff on the call know, but can ask DHS staff, who may be able to supply a further oral history and/or know of any additional records that may exist.

Additionally, this and other boards suffered during COVID and became more “reporting out” boards, which is not what they’re designed to be nor what DHS want them to be.

**Question:** Do we have a concept of what type of recommendations DHS and other county leadership would be receptive to? What level of detail?

**Answer:** We have not heard that, but we also haven’t asked. Your two direct voices to DHS will be the Director of ODS, Brenda Bulkowski, and the Director of OBH. The OBH Director position is currently vacant so the Assistant Director for the Bureau of Mental Health, Jewel Denne, is currently attending these meetings for OBH. She will likely continue to attend as she is able once an OBH Director is hired. We can certainly put that question forward once we have the board in place.

**Comment:** It would be really helpful to review the MHPA statute that established the board in detail once the board is confirmed

**Comment:** NJ talked to some folks in the Philadelphia area who had observed similar trends in the Eastern part of the state where there is potential for a more robust board but has become more of a “rubber stamping” entity over time. Happy to reach out to other counties with more active boards to see why and how they’ve found success.

**Comment:** Based on DF’s experience, the questions the board should be able to answer if they are to give recommendations are the benefits of the recommendation as well as the financial viability – but at this point we still don’t know what the leadership team(s) need.

**Comment:** KM is also curious to learn more about what previous boards have done, particularly given the silo-ing between ODS and OBH services from providers. Not sure who has the power to help think strategically around this.

- That is certainly something that the board can push to be a DHS priority for the next cycle
- **Question:** Are the DHS priorities available to the public and/or board members?
- **Answer:** Yes (see minutes from March 2024 + find on website)

**Comment:** NJ – Agree that workforce is an issue – something we talked about last time thinking about if there’s a mismatch between training and where there are the biggest shortages. There are particularly big gaps in the realm of non-MH disabilities in the MH area. Lack of county-wide gatherings to think strategically about how to improve services. Perhaps the board could be a catalyst for that, or Pitt, for example.

- KM – JHF and DHS are involved in some upcoming community resource fairs, but none of them are ID related. Hold them three times per year and heavily court Pitt Social Work students
- EC – new to serving on an advisory board but has noticed Allegheny County has very outdated points of contact on its website – including providers. If information is not concise and clear, then how can county residents be expected to access services?  
Importance of having more than one way to access information.
  - RF – Agrees and gets to the issue of silos.
  - CS – Agree and very hard to update on a regular basis. For OBH, there is the [Where to Call document](#) (digital and hard copies available).
    - Note that it only includes providers that DHS contracts with for OBH services
  - NJ – developed an app for state of New Jersey by working with CMU to use AI so people looking for resources can find what services they need – no need for manual updating of addresses/phone numbers/etc. once it’s scraping the correct sites

**Note:** Board members will be invited to assist with interview process for OBH director position. It’s not currently posted as the contract for a national recruiter is in the works but should be soon.

**Question:** Possibility of work groups or work sessions? This sounds like a group of people ready to work outside of the every other month requirement.

**Answer:** Not recently, but it is possible. The way this board meets has to follow the Sunshine Act, so it will require some forethought and consulting with Legal to understand what counts as a public session and what does not.

#### **IV. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:35 p.m.

#### **V. Next Public Meeting**

The next public MH/ID Advisory Board meeting will be on **Tuesday, March 11** from 4:30 – 6 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](#).