

Council Meeting Minutes

Date: 4.7.2026

Location: Veteran's Services Building

Attendance

Council members in attendance:

- Gavin Bart
- Colin Cash
- Brandy Brink
- John Donovan
- Wendy Jones
- Fiyyaz Karim
- Pamela Lanhart
- Jeffrey Lind
- Lynne Redleaf
- Anderson Saint Georges
- Kimberly Stokes
- Khou Vang

Absent:

- Autumn Dillie
- Janice Mehle
- William Messinger
- Suzanne Nash
- LaTricia Tate

Office of Addiction and Recovery (OAR) staff:

- Jennifer Blanchard
- Nathaniel Dyess
- Cat Rohde
- Jeremy Drucker
- Ashley Wolf

Guests:

- Shelly Belgarde
- Jeweleen Jackson
- Molly Sullivan
- Meagan Forbes
- Thomas Powell
- Andrew Johnston

Welcome and Roll call

- **Members and guests were welcomed:** Wendy Jones, Chair provided opening remarks and welcomed the council members and guests.
- **Review of Agenda:** Agenda and objectives for the meeting were reviewed.
- **Roll call:** Roll call was taken.
- **Approve minutes:** Members voted to approve the February 2026 minutes.

Council Business

Wendy provided an update on the Communities and Cultures workgroup and asked council members to review the updated charter.

- Changes include workgroup goals, scheduled meetings, Travis Winship's resignation, and the updated statute.
- Members voted to approve the updated council charter.

Wendy provided an update on the group's focus on legislative activity including:

- Guidelines for when and how to represent the Council when interacting with legislators.
 - You should only introduce yourself as a member of the council if you are speaking on an issue that is included as a recommendation in a Advisory Council report or letter to the subcabinet.
 - When sending a letter, it is acceptable to use your organization's letterhead.
- Nathaniel prepared a legislative tracking summary.

Council time with the Office of Addiction and Recovery

Jeremy Drucker and Nathaniel Dyess provided updates from OAR on the following:

- Federal / State updates
 - HR1 cuts
 - We could potentially see 2-3 billion cut due to integrity concerns
- FYI, Naloxone Saturation Reconvening is April 8
 - As a follow-up to the 2024 convening.
- [Interagency State Substance Use Plan Report](#)
 - OAR has met with both professional and community-based partners to get feedback on the report.
 - Action item: Please use the QR code to provide feedback on the report, and identify where there are gaps, what's missing, what's not clear.



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- [2911 Rules have been posted for public comment](#)
 - The comment Period closes on April 30, 2026, at 4:30 p.m.
 - Comments should relate to agency's proposed rule.
- Legislative update
 - Rural hospitals and HCMC are struggling due to changes in the federal bill (HR1).
 - Omnibus Human Services Policy Bill (HF729/SF476)
 - BHA policy bill in both senate and house version
 - Housing stabilization repeal and redesign in both
 - MARRCH policy bill has some provisions in each regarding the claw back

- Several Medical Assistance provisions that will need to be negotiated into both (anti-fraud). There are some in the house version and some in the senate.
- Pharmacist prescribing MOUD (HF4493/SF4486) moved along as a standalone item.
- Removal of random drug testing for MFIP or SNAP (HF1900/SF2868) was moved.
- Electronic Visit Verification (EVV) for peer recovery (HF3634/SF3861) moved through in both the house and senate.
- Omnibus Public Safety Policy Bill (HF3990/SF4760)
 - Age for possession of kratom increased to 21
 - Licensing and inspecting juvenile and adult community-based residential correctional facilities
 - Allowing for alternative standards to 245G in adult and juvenile correctional facilities
- Many anti-fraud and program integrity bills still being negotiated
- New Laws
 - Chapter 40 - Cannabis laboratory testing requirements extension provision
 - Chapter 43 – HUD CoC funding bridge, 9 million appropriation
- [DHS Budget Package](#)
 - Transforming the Human Services System
 - H.R. 1 Compliance
 - Enhancing Program Integrity
 - Housing Stabilization and Redesign
 - Juvenile and Adult Carceral Case Management
 - Behavioral Health Fund County Share Increase to 50%
 - Recovery Residence Certification Date Change: was July 1, 2027, now July 1, 2026

Questions (Q), Answers (A), and Comments (C):

- **C:** SUD is exempt from the Medicaid work requirements.
- **C:** The workgroup will determine what data will be used, so that supporting documentation is not required.
- **C:** DHS presented this morning, but the bill has not been assigned.
- **Q:** Is the case management dependent on income?
 - **A:** Yes, it is linked to Medicaid eligibility.
- **Q:** If a juvenile can go on Medicaid regardless of their parent’s income, can they enter treatment without parental consent?
 - **A:** Yes. Must also meet the eligibility requirements via a screening assessment.
 - **A:** Up to age 26 if a former foster.
- **C:** It’s often unclear who is the county of financial responsibility, which creates challenges when counties are paying a portion of the non-federal share of the cost.
- **Q:** How are rates determined in the individual counties (behavioral health)?
 - **A:** All counties pay the same percentage into the behavioral health fund. Total is based on usage.

Institute for Justice

Megan Forbes from the Institute for Justice presented background studies impacts on workforce access.

- The Institute of Justice is a non-profit civil interest law firm working to remove entry barriers and make it easier for people to re-enter the workforce after being charged or convicted of a crime.
- The institute wants an appeal process.
- There is not currently a way to get the disqualification set aside, even if a person no longer poses a risk of harm.
- The background process is different in each state.
- The bill allows people to seek a “set aside” from the DHS Commissioner.
 - If pardoned or expunged
 - If five years have passed or charges were dropped
 - If ten years have passed since release or sentence completion
- In 2022, the Minnesota Legislature convened the Human Services Background Study Eligibility Task Force.
 - One task force recommendation was to create an appeals and set-aside process for permanent disqualifications.
- **Q:** Can just being charged get you disqualified? Even if you are not convicted?
 - **A:** Yes.

Thomas Powell shared his personal story and how he has been impacted by this issue.

- He grew up in Baltimore and had an opioid addiction at a very young age.
- He was charged with robbery at age 19.
- He had treatment at Metropolitan Medical Center in the 80’s.
- After treatment, he worked for African American Family Services, assisting people coming in for recovery.
- He worked for 22 years with men in court ordered therapy.
- Thomas also worked in legal rights, taught parenting curriculum in prisons, and worked for Hennepin County Medical Center.
- Once the background studies statute passed, Thomas became disqualified and is unable to work.
- Thomas notes that background checks should also look at what is going right, not just what went wrong.
- He is asking for an opportunity to make his case.
- He believes Minnesota is about second chances, but it is lost in the statute.
- **Q for Meagan:** Are you hopeful that this will move forward?
 - **A:** Yes, we are optimistic. We had a positive hearing in the house. We have support in the senate and the house. However, there may be a fiscal note on the bill, and the Institute is not sure what that may be. DHS has been supportive.
- **Q:** Does the licensing board align with DHS
 - **A:** No, they are separate processes

[MN Story Collective](#)

Molly Sullivan introduced MN Story Collective, an initiative at MMB that gathers stories and lived experiences to augment the state’s data.

- She noted that Thomas’s had a lot of stats but hearing his story helped us to understand how he was impacted.
- MN Story Collective focuses on three ideas:
 - The State can learn about complexities

- People are not a number
- We can understand what is happening in communities
- They work with trusted community partners and offer a small stipend to share their stories.
- It is collaborative, cooperative data analysis.
- They compile recommendations to bring back to the state.
- They are transparent and have sessions all over the state, sharing what the results of recommendations are.
- All sharing is confidential.
- They collect stories in six languages.
- Council members can be involved by signing up for the newsletter and contacting Molly about having a sensemaking session at their organization.
- The prompts were created in 2023 to determine what is the broadest question they could ask and informed by community partners

Interagency State Substance Use Plan Report discussion

Interagency State Substance Use Plan – Informing the Subcabinet’s strategic priorities for the state plan.

- Council members were reminded about the areas of focus and Guiding Principles.
- They reviewed a crosswalk of areas of alignment and council areas of focus/priorities/ recommendations.
- The goal of the discussion was to help shape the Subcabinet’s strategic priorities for the state plan.
 - Input will be presented to the Subcabinet before their June priority-setting meeting.
- The council broke into small groups to:
 - Identify anything missing on the crosswalk
 - Identify 3-5 areas of focus or priority that rise to the top and would be most impactful to share with the Subcabinet as they decide on strategic priorities.
- The group came together and shared each group’s selected priorities and the council members voted on the final five priorities to bring to the Subcabinet.
 - **Theme 1 (9 votes)**
 - Revenue – taxes dedicated – Dedicated revenue source
 - Support successful pilot programs and move away from episodic funding
 - **Theme 2 (7 votes)**
 - Housing
 - Unsheltered/Recovery/Youth transition
 - Strategies focused on quality, safe, affordable, choice, community-based housing
 - Theme 3 (6 votes)
 - Pregnant moms
 - Family treatment
 - **Theme 4 (11 votes)**
 - Adolescent SUD services
 - Adolescent continuum of care
 - Adolescent education and prevention
 - Theme 5 (4 votes)
 - Background studies
 - Workforce background studies and paperwork prevention

- **Theme 6 (9 votes)**
 - Community-based recovery infrastructure
 - Defining, building, sustaining
- Theme 7 (2 votes)
 - MOUD OTP
 - Ongoing access to MOUD
- **Theme 8 (7 votes)**
 - Culturally responsive support and care
 - Support and expand funding for traditional healing throughout the substance use disorder continuum of care
 - Create a vendor portal for traditional healers
 - Person-centered

Final comments

- Colin made a motion that the council write a letter in support of the Institute for Justice and the law they are trying to pass regarding background studies. (for the hearing)
 - Motion passed
- Brandy made a motion to add the council to the Institute’s coalition letter acknowledging it had to be reviewed and determined appropriate to sign on to.
 - Motion passed

Next Meeting and adjourn

The Advisory Council meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

Next meeting details include:

- **Date:** Tuesday, 7/14/2026, 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.
- **Time:** 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
- **Location:** Virtual