



Task Force on Holistic and Effective Responses to Illicit Drug Use

Date: 05.14.2025

Open meeting law in-person location, staffing, and task force members in attendance:

Task Force members in attendance: Phil Baebenroth, Jillian Dease, Kurt DeVine, Barry Edwards, Lauren Graber, Ryan Kelly, Alex Kraak, Donald Lannoye, Shane Myre, Dziwe Ntaba, Bradley Ray, Donovan Sather

Absent: Chris Bates, Bill Ward

Design team: Jennifer Blanchard (OAR), Cat Rohde (OAR), Stephanie Klein (MAD), Ari Edelman-McHenry (Rise Research), Anne Siegler (Rise Research)

Other: Dr. Del Pozo, Sonya Mydels, Dave Titus

Agenda items

Welcome and roll call

- **Members and observers were welcomed:** Noted it was a working meeting with (time permitting) public comment at the end, and public can observe and submit comments to the Office of Addiction and Recovery. Noted that the Office of Addiction and Recovery email is located on the [task force website](#).
- **Opening statement by task force chairs:**
 - Dr. Kelly: We've been together for quite some time and we're going to be going through a lot of these recommendations. Today, ideally more of the recommendations that have full support. If you are questioning a recommendation this is the opportunity to talk through it.
 - Dr. DeVine: I think about the work that we're doing because, behind some of the things we're trying to fix, our people have barriers and problems because of the systems currently in place. These are the things that we're trying to fix and the things that we're trying to do are things that affect people's lives every single day.
- **Review of agenda:** Agenda and objectives for the meeting were reviewed.
- **Roll call and introductions:** Roll call was taken.
- **Approve of minutes:** Meeting notes for March and April were approved.

Impromptu discussion

At the top of the Task Force meeting, concerns were raised about potential conflicts of interest and transparency, particularly regarding the involvement of lobbyists and advocacy organizations in the task force. In addition to the summary, where questions were raised and additional information was available, that information is included in the summary under "additional notes."

- Task force member - Just to educate the task force members so we understand some of these processes, I had a question of how Park Street public was selected as the lobbyist group to drive the work of this task force. Is that a decision that was made by state employees? A Rise Research function? Who? Who pays their bill for their time on the task force?
- Convenor (OAR) – The state does not have a contractual relationship with Park Street public. We (Office of Addiction and Recovery) were written into the legislation to provide administrative support for the task force. With that came a small appropriation that covers some of our staff time. We used some of that money to do a small contract with Dr. Del Pozo and Jessica Nielson to pen the first draft of the port. Otherwise, the contract pays for MAD and their facilitation time.
- Task force member - I pulled the campaign finance reports for Chaz Anderson, who's been in many of our groups and at least through 2004, the last report I could find said she's also a paid lobbyist for the Drug Policy Alliance. I would like to understand if she's involved in our work, providing our independent recommendations and channeling that to legislators.
- Convenor (OAR) - If we go back to those original notes from our first couple of meetings when Chaz attended the meetings, they were very transparent about their role, who they represent, and how they were associated with the original legislation that developed the task force. And Rise Research articulated their relationship with the Drug Policy Alliance.
 - Additional note: During the September meeting Chas Anderson introduced themselves and said they were there on behalf of the Drug Policy Alliance and was available to provide input and advice to the task force. Emily Kaltenbach, from the Drug Policy Alliance introduced themselves and noted that they were available to support background information, or additional research around policy issues and their experiences around the country.
- Task force member - Maybe it was early on, but I would ask if there are task force members who know that the lobbyist group is a paid lobbyist for Drug Policy Alliance. It's an important fact and I'd be interesting to see who from the task force was aware of that or not. So, are you? Are you saying Rise Research has been working with Drug Policy Alliance all the way through this?
- Rise Research - No. Our funding for this report came from state tax dollars. It was a bill that was appropriated with 2023 funding that was led by Representative Dave Pinto.
- Task force member - So how involved has the Drug Policy Alliance been in any of the reports or any of this follow up legislative work?
- Rise Research - Very, very minimally. They have some lawyers on staff that we ran some of our takeaways by, but we [Rise Research] wrote 100% of the reports.
- Task force member - So the convenor just said that they've been transparent about their work and who they work with in the involvement, but it seems like you're saying that they haven't been involved at all.
- Rise Research - They have not funded our work.
- Task force member - How did her firm get selected?
- Rise Research – Chaz has a long-standing history working on criminal justice reform for many years. She's a very widely respected lobbyist across the aisle. She works with Republicans and Democrats. When Drug Policy Alliance became interested in doing drug policy reform, they

looked to her because of her long-standing work in the state.

- Task force member - So when you guys selected her, were you aware that she's a paid lobbyist for Drug Policy Alliance?
- Convenor (OAR)- Nobody selected Chaz Anderson.
- Task force member - How is she involved in it then? If the state's not paying her.
- Convenor (OAR) - I think through the relationship with the legislature, (and the Drug Policy Alliance), helping support passing the original task force legislation. She was very explicit to make sure she wasn't an active part of the design team meetings. I certainly feel very comfortable with the firewalls that we've had. The Drug Policy Alliance didn't provide any support in the development of the (Task Force) report.
- Task force member - And what about carrying the recommendations to legislators? Chaz is doing that, right?
- Rise Research - She is involved with doing that.
 - Additional note: Once recommendations were voted for inclusion in the report they went to house research, this was shared during the October meeting when task force members were provided an overview of the process and what it meant for a recommendation to be included in the report.
- Task force member - I think that's important to be part of the record. It needs to be there. I wasn't aware of that and I think when you have a paid lobbyist that's involved in all these meetings, it's an important thing that people need to understand. If Rise Research isn't paying Chaz for her time and we know that the state's not paying Chaz for her time, I'm assuming she's not volunteering her time to be involved in this legislative work, so she's being paid by the Drug Policy Alliance to do this work. She's got to be getting paid by someone to be involved in all these conversations and discussions, in driving our legislative recommendations and how they're presented and moved through. I think that's still an open question about the involvement there and I don't know if it's just Chaz or others in the firm as well. I do know in her disclosure she checked the box saying I am a lobbyist in reporting because I've attempted to influence legislative action on behalf of this entity during the period covered by this report. And that's the 2025 report or 2024 report.
- Rise Research - I know that Chaz is paid by the Drug Policy Alliance. I know that she also has other similar criminal justice reform minded clients including Justice Action Network that have similarly vested interests in these things. I think Drug Policy Alliance gets a bad rap. The recommendations that we're talking about here are not Drug Policy Alliance's recommendations. They're Rise Research's recommendations. They happen to align with some work that Drug Policy Alliance has done because Drug Policy Alliance is also interested in moving forward evidence-based recommendations. I think the question of 'where did the recommendations come from', was us at Rise Research. I just think Chaz is really good at moving legislation forward. She has all these relationships with criminal justice reform minded Legislators on both sides of the aisle. In my mind I am glad that a lobbyist is involved so that our report doesn't just sit on the shelf. It is being made actionable.
- Task force chair - There are a lot of us sitting on this task force who are doing this for absolutely nothing. There are a lot of us that are on this task force that are actually being paid by particular entities, including government entities, including law enforcement entities. And we all have our

biases. I don't think there's anybody that is sitting on this task force that, in any way, impacts how I vote or think. It's my experiences with patients who have barriers to care, barriers to so many things that that drives what we do. I think we all have to check the bias at the door and understand that everybody here is for improving the lives of people.

- Task force member - These lobbyists have to report to their regulatory board much like you do with the medical board. The reporting from these lobbyists indicates that they're advocating on behalf of Drug Policy Alliance. Can we get some additional information about how they do that work with the lobbying firm and what they've advocated for Drug Policy Alliance versus ours? It's my understanding, based on their most recent report from 2023, that the Rise Research researchers both serve on the board of directors for a nonprofit that gets millions of dollars in government grants. And there's a Ryan Kelly listed in the document as serving on the board. If there is a large Minnesota nonprofit that has the potential to benefit from some of this stuff, and the individuals that are repairing the report is one of our Co-chairs or currently sit on the board of this nonprofit, I think that's another important thing for the task force members, legislators, and then the public to know as well.
 - Additional note: Park Street Public did not work on behalf of the task force, they made themselves available if requested by the task force and shared their work to track legislation associated with the recommendations put forward in the Rise Research report and those voted on by the task force.
- Task force chair - I am on the nonprofit (board). I'm on the board for Southside harm reduction and that experience working with people who are struggling with substance use, who are trying to stay healthy, has actually helped mold me into the position that I am. During my introduction back last year, I mentioned that I was on the Board of Southside Harm Reduction.
- Task force member - are the Rise Research researchers still on the board of that nonprofit?
- Rise Research - Yes, absolutely. I serve in a nonpaid capacity on that board and have since it was just one volunteer with a backpack handing out syringes on the south side of Minneapolis to people who are living outside and using drugs. It's an incredible organization. Syringe services programs are evidence based supported by the CDC and the WHO. All these things are listed in our report, and the fact that I'm a subject matter in harm reduction is the reason that I'm on their board.
- Task force member – I think the relationships are important for people to know.
- Park Street Public - I work at Park Street public with Chaz Anderson and work with Drug Policy Alliance and can share what Rise Research said. I'm not part of the task force, but that research requested by the legislature is public and something that organizations use as a foundation for evidence-based policies.
- Task force member - How many other members of Park Street public are registered lobbyists with Drug policy alliance?
- Park Street Public- I believe it's just me and Chaz.
- Task force member - On behalf of the task force, can you assure us that in the 2024 and 2025 legislative session, any of the work that this task force has done and our recommendations have not been discussed with Drug policy alliance?
- Park Street Public - Yes

- Convenor (OAR) - I think one of the things to remember is that as a task force, there was discussion about voting for the recommendations ahead of the session so that they could be taken forward and used by the full legislature. Once those are voted upon and they're made public, they're being utilized by any number of advocacy organizations and legislative groups. It certainly isn't just Chaz and her firm. We've seen these recommendations come up across the aisle and the report specifically that came from the task force was legislatively directed to react to the Rise Research report, and they sit on the task force to provide their knowledge and clarification on those reports, to inform your vote on those recommendations. The Office of Addiction and Recovery had worked with Dr. Del Pozo in the past and asked him, ahead of the task force starting, whether or not he would do an annual plan with us, which is \$5000 and if he would make himself available to the task force. You may recall, we brought forward that Dr. Del Pozo was available to you all if you wanted him to present and when. He isn't coming to represent any one perspective. He's coming to help guide discussion and answer questions.
- Task force member - I'm glad to hear the chair's comments on biases. I think it's spot on. It's just the 'fear' word that the chair mentioned that I think is in existence. I got selected to be on here with the hope of listening and learning and trying to understand everybody's opinions and offering mine when asked or when the time was right but I didn't come in trying to push any agenda other than let's get together as a group and try to make things better for the state of Minnesota and keep people from dying on our streets and preserve public safety. I hope that the intentions were true of everyone trying to put biases aside and make things better for the state.
- Facilitator - Cast your minds back to the first meeting in September, we asked, "Why have you chosen to be a part of this task force?" And I believe that everybody's responses were some variation of, "I'm here because I want to make things better for the people of Minnesota. This is the perspective I bring."
- Task force member - I still didn't hear back from Sonya with regards to assurances that none of the recommendations or task force discussions or stuff we have discussed here at all has been shared with drug policy alliance.
- Park Street Public – We have used the public information.
- Task force chair - Isn't all of this public?
- Convenor (OAR) – Everything we do is all public information. The meetings are public.
- Task force member - I'm sure Chaz does a lot of work behind the scenes on the legislation.
- Task force chair - I think we all do a lot of work behind the scenes. I'm involved in all kinds of different things with legislation, with grants, and I think that everybody on this task force has their fingers in all kinds of things. If they're really interested in this type of work. I spend a majority of my time outside of CentraCare doing grant work and in communities and needless work and all kinds of things. And we need to move on and get to the meeting.

Remaining debrief/discussion on April presentations

- Task force members were given an opportunity for further discussion of the presentations given by Commander Ryan O'Neill of the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office, Sergeant Toy Vixayvong of the St. Paul Police Department, Sergeant Aaron Schmautz of the Portland Police Department, and Rise Research on Drug Policing Recommendations.

- Prompts included points made as the April meeting ended:
 - Our individual experiences often differ from what we see when we research things...in Oregon it was right after the pandemic, it's when fentanyl showed up, and the same thing was happening to us, a lot of patients died.
 - Arrests with no downstream care: a model that doesn't work.
 - Need to focus on destigmatizing addiction. We're not trying to normalize substance use
 - High risk for overdose: people leaving hospitals or detention facilities, tolerance is reduced, without medication [for opioid use disorder]
 - If we don't have treatment in place, we run the risk of repeating the same harms
 - One of the key points, in recommendation 132, says remove criminal and civil penalties for the personal and social use and possession of illicit drugs by adults after investing in health, harm reduction, and social supports.

In-depth discussion of recommendations and poll results

- Facilitator used Mural to walk the task force members through the list of drug policing recommendations, in the order they were prioritized, based on results of the April poll asking, "if you were to vote today, would you choose to pass along this recommendation in the amended report to the legislature?" 13 of 14 Task Force members responded to that poll.
- The group discussed:
 - #130 - 12 yes, 1 no.
 - Task force member - It's a great idea, 100% behind it. But it will cost millions and you have to hire people who can actually respond. There has to be a pretty major infrastructure for every single county in the state. I'm guessing this is statewide. The reality of the price tag that comes with it scared me a little bit.
 - Revised recommendation: Mandate that localities implement 988/911 interoperability to enhance opportunities for alternative crisis response to behavioral health matters. Allocate funding for implementation, staff, and technical assistance to localities. Acknowledge the complexity of implementation.
 - #138 – 11 yes, 2 no.
 - Task force member - If you give drug dealers or the suppliers an option to mirror a different type of pill that would no longer be illegal to possess, you're going to have a counterfeit market of these pills on the streets across Minnesota that are going to be cut with 'who knows what', press with fentanyl, and I think it's just a very hard way to police it.
 - Revised recommendation: Educate law enforcement on buprenorphine, how to identify it, and its effects. Educate patients on how to carry buprenorphine with documentation of prescription.
 - #150 – 11 yes, 2 no.
 - Task force member - What do we mean by compel? Would it be compared to? I think the drug treatment courts have worked well and I don't know if it's to

leave those up to the individual districts for their specific jurisdictions or what would be tied into the state-run certification and then compelling them to follow the standards.

- #140 – 11 yes, 2 no
 - Task force member - I don't charge out any residue based on syringes. I don't share that opinion, that syringes are not paraphernalia, so we can just charge our residue. I think that's a bit of a stretch. I don't think most prosecutors are charging out that way, so I personally see no problem with closing those loopholes.
 - Task force member - I'm convinced I'll change my vote.
- #147 – 11 Yes, 2 no
 - Task force member - I voted no because of the inherent ongoing conflict between the Minnesota Legislature and the Sentencing Guidelines Commission. We have that appointed independent body as the Sentencing Guidelines Commission. I would just leave it to them to do their work.
- #148 – 11 Yes, 2 no
 - Task force member - The intent of the legislation was meant to focus on drug sales or possession physically happening in those zones and not just traveling through. So, to me, it's obvious this should be adopted.
- #146 – 11 Yes, 2 no
 - Task force member – I think most of the people we see through the system are parents and some are primary caretakers, some are not. Some are maybe legal parents, but not active parents, right? We need to look at the defendant as a whole person and especially the residual trauma that might be impacted by their incarceration.
- #141 – 11 Yes, 2 no
 - Task force member - Are there examples of local jurisdictions that are circumventing state laws?
 - Rise Research - We've heard a couple cases from Minneapolis police and Metro Transit. They are charging people with possession of drug paraphernalia materials.
- #131 – 11 Yes, 2 no
- #149 – 10 Yes, 3 no
 - Task force member – Any way to make it more specific to sex workers so that they are not kind of bundled into the same consideration?
 - Rise Research - Isn't sex trafficking already illegal?
 - Task force member – Is sex trafficking considered sex work?
 - Task force member - I think we often have people who are fearful to admit that it's not consensual. How are we going to handle these when they're a young adult and maybe not in a position to claim that it's not consensual.

- Note – Task force members agreed to rewrite this recommendation before the June meeting.
- #144 – 10 Yes, 3 no
 - Task force member - This one feels very much in alliance with our understanding of substance use disorders as a medical condition that needs support.
- #142 – 10 Yes, 3 no
 - Task force member - This is just a huge, huge point of contention and something that I hear from people all the time and the incredibly punitive interventions that happen as a result of universal drug testing.
- #135 – 10 Yes, 3 no

Conversation with Dr. Del Pozo

- Dr. Ray introduced Dr. Del Pozo, sharing his experience in law enforcement and research. He encouraged task force members to ask his opinion to help address any concerns with the drug policing recommendations.
- Dr. Del Pozo spoke briefly about his first experience with MN to talk to local police chiefs about addiction and talked about spending the summer in Portugal talking to police about their approach to drug decriminalization.
 - Police in Portugal started taking people back to the station to search them in private to determine if the amount they had qualified as personal possession, and then could be released without being charged.

Questions and discussion:

- Comment: Task force member – I am concerned about implicit bias.
- Q: Task force member – How can we implement that to be legal?
 - A: Dr. D – Portugal has some police powers, i.e. – can compel testimony to find out who drug dealer are. Here, you have to determine if you have the authority, enough cause, to conduct a criminal investigation? Whether it's charged as a crime or civil matter depends on the results of your investigation. If it's civil, then you can release them. How many of your quality-of-life problems can only be dealt with through the sole charge of possession? Do you have the power of the law to start an investigation and remove someone from the scene?
- Comment: Task force member: I agree with the member. What Dr D described would, in the US, be an unconstitutional seizure.
- Comment: Task force member – We have heard that police in Portugal are embedded in the education system.
 - Response: Dr. D – Portugal is a tight knit community. The approach to decrim is paternalistic. The goal was to help people stop using drugs. There's no waiting list for methadone in Portugal and it is free of charge. They had the infrastructure in place to treat people. In my experience in the US, charging someone with a crime didn't solve anything. It did not deter use and did not help the individual. If you need legal authority to remove someone from a scene, you can decline to prosecute and offer services.

- Q: Task force member – As a prosecutor, what we are doing right now is charging and giving the option to go into treatment. If they are successful, the charge can be removed. If we don't have the opportunity to charge, how can we incent them to go into treatment?
 - A: Dr. D – treatment is rarely successful the first time. Is the threat of a criminal record enough to incent people to enter recovery? I think every jail/prison should be able to treat during the period of incarceration. Do you have any data on relapse rates?
- Comment: Task force member – We're told treatment courts are very successful.
 - Response: Dr. D – very few cases make it as far as drug court. Almost all (esp. minor) cases are in misdemeanor court. That does not get the person help.
- Q: Task force chair – How does the relationship between LE and users change if the goal in preventing records and improving access to resources?
 - A: Dr. D – Police are no longer seen as something to fear and run from. Additionally, families are more comfortable asking police for help instead of hiding their loved one from possible criminal charges. It allows the user and family to view the cop as an ally.
- Q: Task force chair – what resources do we need to support that relationship?
 - A: Dr. D – You need to expand access to treatment. The solution has to be well-funded and organized. Treatment and supportive housing needs to be available within a day.
- Q: Task force member – when we talk about decriminalizing the user, we have to talk about how the big investigations get started. If possession of controlled substances is no longer illegal, you're going to run into issues with dog sniffs, etc. How do you fill those gaps?
 - A: Dr. D – Personal possession of a controlled substance is decriminalized, but the sale and possession in quantity is still illegal. Once you have a target and then can ID the "higher ups", you can rely on more phone work and surveillance to create higher quality cases in the beginning. You can flip someone to be an informant without a possession charge. A person with addiction is not usually willing to flip on their dealer with the threat of a misdemeanor. The police usually have someone more on them, a higher charge.
- Q: Task force member – MN police are not trying to arrest drug users. We are trying to get people to resources, but it is not easy. Sometimes the resources are not available. In my experience, cops are trying to get people help, but interaction is driven by the nature of the crime and the call to 911. What was your style targeting drug users?
 - A: Dr. D – NYPD has changed their approach over the years. They stopped arresting and incarcerating for misdemeanors. Cops look for reasons not to charge users. Decrim (by definition) is changing the law from a crime to a civil matter. Alone, it will fail. In practice, it is building a well-funded system to help people into recovery, into housing, help with employment.
- Comment: Dr. D – For cops to buy into a solution they have to believe in it. You must build your solution out. I don't understand how that produces more robbery, shootings and burglaries.
 - Response: Task force member – if the market is increasing in a certain area, that supply has to come from somewhere. That will result in an increase in violent crimes.
- Q: Task force chair – Decriminalizing possession wouldn't necessarily increase the flow of drugs

in to a place. What are your thoughts on that?

- A: Dr. D – If you're still confiscating the drugs and creating a record of the incident, I don't think that's going to provide an incentive for people to come to Minnesota. Have you considered making the first few offenses a misdemeanor, but bringing criminal charges to repeat offenders?
- Q: Task force member – how do we confiscate narcotics if it's not illegal?
 - A: Dr. D – In Portugal, seeing the drugs mean it's a crime until proven otherwise, to do that you have to weigh the product.
- Q: Task force member – back to Lauren's concern on implicit bias, do you have any comments on that?
 - A: Dr. D – I am optimistic toward officer and prosecutor's ability to use discretion.

June meeting and next steps

- The June meeting will include further discussion of the recommendations before voting.

Public comment

- There was not public comment provided.

Next meeting and adjourn

- The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 11 and will be a fully virtual meeting.