MINNESOTA GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

The Masonic Institute for the Developing Brain
Conference Center
2025 East River Parkway
Minneapolis, MN 55414

MEETING MINUTES

Members Present
Heather Kainz, Chair
Jenny Arndt, Vice-Chair
Holly Andersen
Luke Bourdeaux
Prince Cole
Daonna Depoister (online)
Lisa Jemtrud
Jen Hall-Lande
Heidi Hamilton
Joel Liestman
Elizabeth Marsh
Chris McVey (online)
Katie McDermott
Carolyn Perron
Janna Peterson (online)
Mary Raasch
Dan Reed
Ashley Reiff
Kaylie Schmidt
Bonnie Jean Smith
Sumukha Terakanambi
Garrett Zayic

Members Excused
Alan Morrison
Jennifer Santema
Heather Stillwell

Guests

Connie Burkhart
Dupree Edwards
Amy Hewitt
Admin Commissioner Tamar Gronvall
Sina Hanson
Admin Assistant Commissioner Betsy Hayes
Derek Pearson
Tom Pearson
Garrett Petrie
Connie Rabideaux
Eric Rabideaux
Lee Shervheim

Staff Present
Stephanie Nelson
Paul Nevin
Colleen Wieck

I. **MEETING CALLED TO ORDER**—Heather Kainz, Council Chair, called the meeting to order at 12:15 pm.

II. **HONORING OUR OUTGOING MEMBERS (Alphabetical Order)**

Heather Kainz introduced the Department of Administration Commissioner Tamar Gronvall and Assistant Commissioner Betsy Hayes. Both Gronvall and Hayes wanted to attend today's meeting to offer their appreciation to all members of the Council, both the outgoing members and the incoming members. They praised the amazing and important work of the Council and the statewide impact of programs such as Treat People Like People and Ambassadors for Respect. They also specifically welcomed Chair Kainz and thanked former Chair Shervheim for his 9 years of service.

Chair Kainz then read the following tributes in (alphabetical order) and presented everyone their plaques:

Tribute to Jason Blomquist (unable to attend)
Jason Blomquist has been an outstanding member of the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, offering six years of dedicated, heartfelt leadership as a committed self-advocate. Jason's work ethic is remarkable. He often manages three jobs while still generously volunteering his time to support others in the disability community. His determination, integrity, and willingness to speak candidly have provided invaluable homeowner perspectives that have strengthened the Council's discussions and decisions. Jason's voice has elevated the importance of self-advocacy and exemplified perseverance and purpose in action. We are deeply grateful for his

service and proudly recognize the meaningful impact he has made throughout his years on the Council.

Tribute to Dupree Edwards

Dupree Edwards has been an inspiring figure on the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities. With six years of dedicated service, Dupree brings passion, creativity, and a heartfelt commitment to self-advocacy. As a talented hip-hop artist, he offers a unique and authentic voice to the disability community, using his music and storytelling to raise awareness and lift others up. No one else could craft a song about the 245D Bill of Rights—and make it rhyme—quite like Dupree.

His leadership on the Council shines through his honesty, courage, and unwavering dedication to ensuring that people with developmental disabilities can speak for themselves and shape their own futures. Dupree's contagious energy, integrity, and personal experience have enriched every discussion and strengthened the Council's efforts. We truly appreciate all he has contributed and proudly honor the lasting impact he has made through both his advocacy and his art.

Tribute to Amy Hewitt

Amy Hewitt has been an exceptional member of the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, contributing six years of thoughtful leadership, deep expertise, and an unwavering commitment to inclusion. Through her work at the Institute on Community Integration, Amy brought a powerful statewide—and national—perspective that consistently strengthened the Council's priorities and direction.

Amy's steady guidance, integrity, and collaborative spirit have left a lasting imprint on the Council's work and mission. When the Council could no longer meet at the University of Minnesota Conference Center, Amy generously arranged for the Council to continue using the space. When the federal budget faced significant threats, Amy played a pivotal role in organizing the April 2025 Council meeting as a Town Hall with Congressional staff, ensuring the disability community's concerns were clearly heard.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude for her service and wish her continued success as she advances her advocacy and leadership in the years ahead.

Tribute to Lesli Kerkhoff

Lesli Kerkhoff has been an invaluable representative of the Department of Human Services on the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities. Lesli has brought insight, professionalism, and strong leadership to the Council's work. As a supervisor at DHS, Lesli has consistently demonstrated a deep commitment to improving services and supports for people with developmental disabilities across Minnesota.

Lesli is frequently at the center of interagency initiatives, navigating complex collaborations with clarity, steadiness, and a solutions-focused approach. She has a

remarkable ability to translate policy into practice, helping state systems work more effectively together and ensuring that the needs of individuals and families remain at the forefront. Her thoughtful guidance has strengthened critical projects, ranging from quality assurance efforts to person-centered practices, and her willingness to step forward—often quietly but decisively—has been essential in moving difficult issues toward resolution.

In addition to her expertise, Lesli's reliability and professionalism have earned the respect of colleagues across agencies. She brings a calm, balanced perspective to the Council's discussions, often helping bridge differing viewpoints and fostering productive, collaborative decision-making. Her dedication to partnership and system improvement has made a lasting impact on the Council's work and on the broader disability services network.

Tribute to Garrett Petrie

Garrett Petrie has been an exceptional member of the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, contributing six years of dedicated service and strong leadership. As Chair of the Public Policy Committee, Garrett guided the Council's policy priorities with clarity, thoroughness, and a deep commitment to improving outcomes for people with developmental disabilities across Minnesota.

In his role at the Minnesota Department of Education, focusing on low-incidence disabilities, Garrett brought valuable expertise and a broad statewide perspective that continually enriched the Council's discussions. He has a particular talent for distilling complex policy issues into clear, actionable recommendations and for ensuring that the voices of individuals with developmental disabilities—and their families—remain central to conversations about education and long-term supports.

Garrett's steady leadership, inclusive approach, and thoughtful facilitation strengthened the Council's decision-making and helped build consensus across diverse viewpoints. His commitment to meaningful, person-centered policy change has been instrumental in advancing the Council's mission.

Tribute to Connie Rabideaux

Connie Rabideaux of Cloquet, Minnesota, has been a remarkable and steadfast member of the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, contributing a total of 6 years of service this term and having previously served on the Council. As a mental health therapist, Connie brings deep professional insight into the emotional, social, and behavioral supports that individuals with developmental disabilities and their families need to thrive. Her work is further informed by her experience as the mother of an adult child with developmental disabilities, grounding her contributions in compassion, authenticity, and lived understanding. Connie's commitment, calm presence, and thoughtful guidance have enriched the Council's discussions and strengthened its priorities over many years. We extend our heartfelt gratitude for her dedication,

leadership, and the meaningful impact she has had on the Council and the broader community.

Tribute to Lee Shervheim

Thank you, Lee Shervheim, for your outstanding leadership as Chair of the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities. For nine years, you have served as a member and recently guided the Council with dedication, stability, and a deep commitment to improving the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities across the state.

As the father of three daughters with Down syndrome, you brought a deeply personal perspective that enriched every discussion and grounded the Council's work in real experiences of Minnesota families. Your heartfelt advocacy, thoughtful insight, and steady presence helped ensure that the Council remained focused on what truly matters—advancing opportunities, fostering inclusion, and providing meaningful support for people with developmental disabilities.

Lee's leadership extended well beyond the Chair role. He simultaneously served as Chair of the Grant Review Committee, overseeing complex decisions with fairness, clarity, and a strong sense of responsibility. Under his guidance, the Council developed its next Five-Year State Plan, setting the highest priorities for Federal Fiscal Years 2027 through 2031. His influence can be seen throughout the plan's vision, strategies, and commitments, reflecting both practical wisdom and a deep respect for the voices of self-advocates and families.

Lee is known for his calm, measured approach, his ability to bring people together, and his unwavering integrity. Whether navigating a challenging issue, fostering collaboration across agencies, or simply offering encouragement to new members, he led with humility and purpose. His service strengthened the Council's mission, helped elevate critical conversations statewide, and set a strong foundation for the work that lies ahead.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to Lee for his remarkable contributions, steadfast leadership, and personal dedication. His impact will continue to shape the Council's efforts and benefit Minnesotans with developmental disabilities for many years to come.

Each outgoing member then spoke about their experiences on the Council.

III. INTRODUCTIONS

Kainz invited all present to introduce themselves.

IV. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Kainz called for the approval of today's agenda. **MOTION:** Zayic moved, seconded by Cole to approve the Agenda. Motion carried.

V. APPROVAL OF COUNCIL MINUTES (June 3, 2026)

Kainz called for the approval of the June 3, 2026, Minutes. **MOTION:** McDermott moved, seconded by Cole to approve the Minutes. Motion carried

VI. PROGRAM PRESENTATION: THE 2025 CUSTOMER RESEARCH SURVEY OF PARTNERS IN POLICYMAKING GRADUATES

Derek Pearson MarketResponse International presented the results of a survey of Partners in Policymaking graduates. Tom Pearson was also in attendance.

Pearson summarized more than 175 stories shared by graduates of the Partners in Policymaking program, gathered from surveys and interviews. The stories came from self-advocates and family members who completed the program between 1987 and 2025. The findings were organized into ten themes describing the lasting impact of the program on graduates' lives and advocacy work.

Graduates consistently emphasized that learning the history of the disability rights movement was a pivotal moment. Many described encountering this history for the first time through Partners, which created a sense of responsibility to continue advancing disability rights. The program was also described as transformative, giving graduates a renewed sense of identity, hope, and possibility. Individuals shared personal milestones such as gaining independent housing, securing employment, and seeing major positive life changes for themselves or their children.

Another major theme was the deep sense of belonging formed within the disability community. Many graduates had previously navigated disability in isolation; meeting others with similar experiences helped them feel less alone and encouraged sustained involvement. This contributed to significant growth in confidence. Graduates described learning to speak up in settings ranging from IEP meetings to legislative testimony, shifting from passive acceptance to active advocacy and feeling assured that their voices mattered.

Graduates also reported gaining a stronger understanding of disability services and how to navigate them effectively. They described becoming more capable of asking the right questions, asserting their rights, and overturning incorrect denials. This increased clarity and engagement improved their ability to support their own families and others. Parents noted substantial changes in how they approached education systems, particularly in IEP processes, moving from deference to informed and assertive advocacy.

Graduates expressed heightened awareness of inclusion and accessibility in their communities. With new tools and confidence, they worked on projects ranging from installing accessible infrastructure in schools to serving as members of committees that shaped local community environments. Many reported taking on broader system-change efforts, including legal action, legislative testimony, and participation in state-level councils. Their advocacy extended beyond individual issues toward shaping policy and institutional practices.

The program also played a significant role in leadership development and career growth. Graduates described new professional pathways and increased recognition of their expertise, leading to advisory appointments, advanced degrees, nonprofit leadership, and meaningful employment for self-advocates. Across stories, graduates highlighted that Partners strengthened their commitment to independence and self-direction. They advocated for person-centered planning, higher expectations within schools and adult services, and the right to make choices about their own lives.

Across all ten themes, graduates described a consistent arc: learning disability history helped them understand the larger movement they were part of; gaining confidence allowed them to use their voices effectively; community connections provided lasting support; and these changes collectively empowered them to shift from being managed by systems to actively shaping them through advocacy, leadership, and legislative influence.

The Council members shared personal reflections after hearing the report. Zayic stated that the findings align with the value and impact of the program, noting that other states do not have a program with comparable strength. McDermott emphasized that life can be a roller coaster, and that self-advocates must learn to speak up for their needs, as some county case managers may underestimate their abilities. He stressed the importance of using one's voice. Smith shared that Partners gave her hope and provided an alternative to segregated settings, adding that both the Council and Partners create a sense of safety. Raasch explained that she had been in a day program and attended Partners where she learned public speaking; although she was initially nervous, she now presents during the first weekend of the program. Schmidt described the deep trust the program fosters and underscored the importance of continually sharing personal stories, reminding everyone that lives matter and that these are real people—not data points or numbers.

VII. GRANT REVIEW COMMITTEE

Kainz confirmed that all Council members signed a Conflict-of-Interest form before the vote was taken. Jenny Arndt served as Chair for today's meeting. There were two applications received in response to the Customer Research RFP. **MOTION:** On behalf of the Grant Review Committee, Arndt moved to approve a contract with MarketResponse International. The motion was seconded by Cole. The motion carried with no abstentions.

VIII. PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE

Terakanambi provided an overview of today's meeting. Ann Zukoski and Sam King, MMB, provided an update on the Healthy Aging Initiative, a statewide effort to improve coordination across agencies and strengthen policies that support aging Minnesotans. MMB aims to complete a multi-sector Healthy Aging Plan by April 2027, informed by extensive community engagement and cross-agency collaboration. Council members were asked to give feedback on two questions. The members emphasized the need for person-centered services, accessible housing, reliable transportation, improved

workforce stability, and clearer system navigation. Members also noted significant strain on informal caregivers, who increasingly experience financial hardship, burnout, and limited support.

Kirsten Olson, from the Minnesota Board on Aging (MBA) presented information on its statewide legal assistance system and described ongoing efforts to protect autonomy, prevent unnecessary guardianship, and ensure access to legal services for older adults. MBA's Legal Needs Survey, open through August 31, 2026, seeks to identify gaps in legal support and better understand barriers facing aging Minnesotans. MBA highlighted strong alignment between elder justice and disability justice principles, including independence, inclusion, and self-determination.

An update was provided on the proposed Olmstead Plan; no new revisions have been released, and additional information will be shared at the October meeting or earlier if needed.

Terakanambi presented a detailed update on Medicaid issues affecting people with disabilities in Minnesota. He provided a handout for everyone. He reported that federal oversight resulted in provider revalidation requirements and payment holds, which contributed to service disruptions. Approximately two thousand providers were successfully revalidated, while over three thousand were disenrolled due to administrative issues rather than fraud, with many appealing and returning to billing. Federal claim deferrals involving hundreds of millions of dollars have also created uncertainty. Legislators have sought clarity from state officials, and the LTSS Advisory Council continues to develop cost-saving recommendations for future legislative consideration. Terakanambi also reviewed new federal rules linking medical frailty determinations to work capability, noting concerns about increased documentation burdens and data gaps. Minnesota has joined a legal challenge asserting that the rule exceeds federal authority. He encouraged continued awareness and engagement to mitigate impacts on individuals relying on Medicaid services.

Members provided their comments about the delayed payments, political motivation, the fraud rate of Minnesota is lower than other states, and how other states are proceeding with freezing funds, lowering reimbursement rates, and placing the burden on people with disabilities.

IX. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Wieck reported that the federal allocation received for Federal Fiscal Year 2026 is $1,145,074, which is $7,660 less than the FFY 2025 amount, and noted that both the President's Budget and the House Appropriations Committee call for level funding for Councils.

She shared that several governor appointments were made in June, including new representatives from MDE, ICI, MDLC, a nonprofit, and two parents filling open terms.

The Five-Year Plan has been revised to comply with federal character limits, reviewed by two external readers, posted on the Council's website in multiple accessible formats, and will be submitted by the August 15, 2026 deadline.

The Disability History User-Centric Design project is complete and ready for release, following input from self-advocates and families, the creation of a unified brand and format, video selection, and permissions for editing; staff encouraged members to use and share the lesson plan with educators.

The Treat People Like People campaign continues to demonstrate broad reach, with nearly nine million social media views, over seven million ad views, more than three million video views, substantial website traffic, and distribution of 200,000 branded items, along with podcast releases and a Dignity of Risk section.

Council staff reviewed more than 500 pages of comments on the proposed Olmstead Plan revision, and the Subcabinet met in June to discuss the feedback and the Disability Systems Change Council, with the next Subcabinet meeting scheduled for September 15, 2026.

The Partners in Policymaking program has selected Class 44 and completed a review of all forms and resources. The program will mark its 40th anniversary in May 2027 with an Open House and the release of a documentary and publication.

X. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Kainz opened the floor for announcements.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Kainz called for adjournment of the meeting. **MOTION**: McDermott moved, seconded by Bourdeaux, that the meeting be adjourned. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Colleen Wieck
Executive Director