**Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council Meeting**

**March 12, 2025, via Zoom**

**Council Meeting Minutes**

**Present:** Gyasi Burks-Abbott, Raquel Quezada, Ann Lynch, Sandra Heller, Elaine Gabovitch, Alana Russo, Chantal Johnson, Asha Abdullahi, Cynthia Laine, Cody Rooney, Camille Karabaich, Timothy Cahill, Austin Carr, Amber Pettell, Cindy Thomas, Tatiana Thomas, Bridget Levandowski, Winnie Koko, Cristina Cortez, Carolyn Kain

**Excused:** Barbara L’Italien, Chelsey Goddard, Paul Lufty, Annette Peele

**Absent:** William Edes, Sarah Kelleher, Katherine Beibel, Andrew Carr, Priscilla Bessa, Diane Lescinskas

**Guests:** LeeAnne Lemaire, Keila Torres, Ilea Ortiz, Laila Garcia

**Staff:** Craig Hall, Lee Larriu, Andre Williams, Patricia Jackson, Jennifer Bertrand, Jackson Crilley, Mary Davis, Liz Fancher, Adelia DelTrecco, Kaitlin Stober, Tamara Huntley

Raquel Quezada, Chairperson, convened the meeting at 6:02 pm, welcoming everyone.

**1. Acceptance of the Agenda: Motion** to accept passed unanimously**.**

First: Alana Russo Second: Carolyn Kain

Voting Poll Results: Passed

**2. Approval of December Meeting Minutes: Motion** to approve passed unanimously**.**

First: Sandra Heller Second: Cody Rooney

Voting Poll Results: Passed

3. **Updates from the Chairperson, Raquel Quezada, Chairperson**

Raquel called the meeting to order and stated our first order of Business: Do we have a quorum?

She welcomed our New Council Member: Cristina Cortez and in addition, we have a new Mass Office of Disabilities (MOD) representative Camille Karabaich and a new alternate for MOD, Lilia Melikechi. Another housekeeping item is the Executive Office of Elder Affairs has had a new name change to the Executive Office of Aging and Independence. Also welcome our guest: Keila Torres from Conexiones Latinx-MA; our grantee, who will be presenting tonight.

Raquel shared that the MDDC supported the DD Council in California during the fires. Staff shipped many masks to the DD Council in California. This year, with the wonderful support of the Williams Elementary School in Bridgewater and MDDC Staff, we were able to bring smiles to 386 veterans at the Brockton VA Hospital. These heartfelt Valentines were delivered just in time for their visits, reminding them that they are remembered and appreciated. The Brockton VA Hospital cares for approximately 225 patients, and it’s truly heartwarming to know that each one received these tokens of gratitude

Next is our upcoming events. They are as follows:

* Saturday, March 15th - Access 2 Community & Friendship – Evening of Mindfulness 6-9PM Non-Profit Center, 89 South St, Boston, MA
* Saturday, March 22 - Youth VOC – Journey to Self-Discovery - 10-2:30pm

Tuesday, April 8th – 20th Annual Autism Day – 10:00 am at the State House-Great Hall

Saturday, May 31st MASS Western Region Self-Advocacy Conference

Wednesday, June 11th MDDC Council Meeting

Wednesday, September 10th MDDC Council Meeting

Monday, Nov. 17-19th Generational Leadership Summitt

Wednesday, December 10th MDDC Council Meeting

**4. Committee Reports:**

**Executive Committee – Raquel Quezada, Chairperson**.

Raquel deferred the report to Craig Hall.

**Annual Program Performance Report** – Craig reported that the PPR was to be submitted March 28, 2025.

**5 Year Analysis** – Craig provided a of the presentation

Staff have re focused on Medicaid and MassHealth – Craig reported that the staff responded quickly to the information about reductions in Medicaid and a new web page was constructed.

**Generational Leadership Summit 2025** – Craig reported that DDS joined as a co-sponsor and the summit was scheduled for September 29,30, October 1.

**Permanent Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities** – Craig presented on observations on federal developments and the presentation was posted on the Council website.

**Membership** –**Cody Rooney, Vice Chairperson-Committee Chairperson; Adelia DelTrecco, Staff**

Cody stated: As you all know, we have a new Council member, Cristina Cortez and welcomed Cristina. Cristina was one of the applicants that was chosen, interviewed and endorsed by the Council last year. We are now up to date on all appointments and re-appointments that were sent to the Governor’s Appointments Office last year. Council members on the Membership Committee are actively recruiting new applicants for our upcoming vacancies in October.

**Public Policy Committee – Gyasi Burks-Abbott, Committee Chairperson, Jennifer Bertrand, Staff**

Kaitin Stober reported the following:

* Our MDDC policy committee has been meeting monthly, and we are going to be meeting on the second Tuesday of every month at 3 PM moving forward (aside from days that fall on holidays)
* The MDDC legislative priority survey helped us learn about what policy topics are most important to people in MA.
  + 400 people responded to our survey, and 17% of respondents reported having DD
  + 287 participants shared their zip code, so we can see that we got opinions from all over the state
  + All topics were rated as important by participants, and many overlap with each other.
  + 5 topics were rated as the most important to our respondents: 1) Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS), 2) Direct Care Workforce, 3) Housing, 4) Healthcare, 5) Community Recreation and Social Opportunities
* This survey was just one part of the process to choose legislative priorities. This process included: 1) Research, 2) Evaluative Criteria and Feasibility Considerations, 3) Public Policy Committee Review, and 4) Full Council Membership approval.
  + The Full Council voted to approve our [proposed legislative priorities](https://www.mass.gov/doc/mddc-proposed-2025-2026-legislative-priorities/download).
* On February 13, 2025, the MDDC hosted our Biennial Disability Bill Sharing Session at the MA State House & virtually.
  + [Biennial Disability Bill Sharing Session | Mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/biennial-disability-bill-sharing-session)
  + [2025 MDDC Disability Bill Sharing Session](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QefSG3q0Sd8)
  + [Bill Sharing Resource Sheet - 2025 MDDC Bill Sharing Session](https://www.mass.gov/doc/bill-sharing-resource-sheet-2025-mddc-bill-sharing-session/download)
* On February 11, 2025, the MDDC hosted a virtual information session on Medicaid for the DD Community.
  + [Medicaid Matters: MDDC Education & Advocacy Information Session](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1zmoZvaGNaU)
  + [Medicaid Matters - MDDC Education and Advocacy Information Session Presentation](https://www.mass.gov/doc/medicaid-matters-mddc-education-and-advocacy-information-session-presentation/download)
  + [Medicaid Resources | Mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/medicaid-resources)
* We are still collecting Medicaid stories from community members! You can share your story here: [surveymonkey.com/r/R938FB9](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/R938FB9)
* On February 27, 2025, the MDDC hosted a Delegate Forum on Medicaid. Many citizen council members shared their stories with our representatives, senators an/or their staff. Senator Ed Markey attended.
  + [Medicaid Forum with Massachusetts Delegation](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UbLWXjgZoBw)
  + [MDDC Policy Spotlight: Medicaid](https://www.mass.gov/doc/mddc-policy-spotlight-medicaid/download)
  + [Medicaid Matters: Community Stories | Mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/medicaid-matters-community-stories)
* On March 6, 2025, the MDDC and the Arc hosted the 47th Annual Legislative Reception. The theme for the reception this year is "Safeguarding Our Rights Through Advocacy,” where we celebrated this year's Legislator of the Year Awardees: Senator Robyn K. Kennedy and Representative Sean Garballey. Several hundred people attended the event.

MDDC Policy team members Jennifer Bertrand and Kaitlin Stober have been participating in a National Data Training program on disability employment, hosted by the Disability Employment TA Center. These workshops give us the chance to learn from experts alongside staff from other DD Councils across the country. The Policy Committee reviewed the proposed MDDC FY25-26 Legislative Priorities and MDDC Endorsed Bills with the full Council for their vote.

**Acceptance of the Proposed FY25-26 MDDC Legislative Priorities**

**Motion** to accept passed unanimously**.**

First: Gyasi Burks-Abbott Second: Sandra Heller

Voting Poll Results: Passed

**Acceptance of the Proposed MDDC Endorsed Bills**

**Motion** to accept passed unanimously**.**

First: Gyasi Burks-Abbott Second: Sandra Heller

Voting Poll Results: Passed

**Community Engagement Committee – Cynthia Liane, Committee Chairperson; Andre Williams, Staff**

Cynthia shared one of the most recent programs that the committee was engaged in which was an all-inclusive basketball program for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Cynthia also shared that she will be stepping down in her role as Committee Chairperson and thanked everyone for the opportunity she had.

**5. Grants Update/Presentation – Conexiones Latinx-MA Presentation – Keila Torres,** **Liz Fancher, Staff**

**Conexiones Latinx-MA:** Keila Torres, Executive Director, gave a presentation aboutthe “Empower-ABILITY” small grant.  The project empowers Spanish-speaking families by providing them with comprehensive training and tools to advocate for their loved ones with disabilities. The five objectives are advocacy and policy development through leadership, resource development and accessibility, special education awareness, transition and employment inclusion, and healthcare and well-being.  In all trainings, Conexiones-Latinx-MA teaches families the importance of advocating for their rights.

Keila shared key strategies and several examples of how families successfully used their new advocacy skills to attain services and supports.  Accomplishments include creating and sharing resources in Spanish, offering 20 trainings and a special education clinic, creating a digital resource library, promoting opportunities in the community, collaborating with other organizations, and establishing an ongoing support group for families.  Conexiones Latinx-MA has helped 296 families to date across Massachusetts; all the families expressed satisfaction and gratitude for the project. Keila thanked the Council for its financial support, without which this project would not have happened.

Liz Fancher reported that future grant funding is on hold until Congress passes a continuing resolution, and the Council receives information about its federal fiscal year 2025 budget.  Council members interested in participating in grant reviews should contact Liz at [liz.fancher@mass.gov](mailto:liz.fancher@mass.gov).

**6. Trails for All Initiative Introduction – Cody Rooney, Chelsey Goddard, Bridget Levondowski; Jackson Crilley, Staff**

Bridget Levondowski shared with the Council an introduction of the initiative along with its purpose and goals.

**7. Self-Advocacy & Training Team Update – Lee Larriu and Staff**

Andre Williams and Tamara Huntley reported that during the past two months The MDDC Self Advocacy and Training Team has completed 3 Positive Me: Building Self Esteem series. A total of 33 participants graduated.  Our newest partner is Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries. The team has been very busy outside of training. We participate in different councils and committees such as the PCA Workforce Council to ensure we have a voice at the table and implement systems change. Council staff recently joined a third sub-committee called the Consumer Employer Mistreatment Protection Committee. The committee is outlining strategies to help protect consumer employers.

Council staff also participate in PCORI- Mother’s Lab through Brandeis University. PCORI stands for Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute, a nonprofit that funds research to help people make informed health decisions. Currently the group is engaged in the development of a podcast to educate researchers from a disabled parent’s perspective. The Teach Disability History Campaign with Easter Seals, council staff is in the middle of creating another history video clip, this time on The Self-Advocacy Movement.

To prepare for the recent 47th legislative Reception, the Arc held a Webinar with MDDC as a guest talking about the upcoming reception and legislative process.  The Webinar can be found on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0r6jwxHp6w>. The Self Advocacy Training Team is launching two Supported Decision-Making training series for March, one starting on March 12 and ending on April 2 (Monday-Wednesday). And the other starting on March 13 and ending on April 3 (Tuesday-Thursday). Space is currently full. Coming Soon is an Employment Series to be held in April and May Along with another Positive Me: Building Self Esteem series stay tuned for more information. If you are interested, please contact Lee Larriu, her contact information is [lee.larriu@mass.gov](mailto:lee.larriu@mass.gov)

**8. Other Business –** No other business

**9. Council Meeting Survey -** Raquel stated that a link to our Council Meeting Survey has been sent to your email, we ask that you please take 3 mins and complete the survey for us.

**10. Adjournment**

Motion to adjourn was approved unanimously.

First: Cody Rooney Second: Gyasi Burks-Abbott

Voting Poll Results: Passed

The meeting was adjourned at 7:19pm.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Review/ Approved

Alana Russo, Secretary Date:

Craig Hall /s/

Review/Approved

Craig Hall, Executive Director Date: