



Middlesex County Restoration Center Commission
Monday, February 23, 2026
10:00 AM – 11:00 AM
Virtual

Attending Commission Members:

Peter Koutoujian, Sheriff, Middlesex Sheriff's Office, Co-Chair
Danna Mauch, Massachusetts Association for Mental Health, Co-Chair
Cindy Friedman, Senator – 4th Middlesex District
Roy Frost, Chief of Police, Billerica Police Department
Lydia Conley, Association for Behavioral Healthcare
Matthew Broderick, Department of Mental Health
Lee Robinson, MassHealth Office of Accountable Care & Behavioral Health Services
Audrey Shelto, Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation (retired)
Paula Carey, former Chief Justice of the Trial Court
Eliza Williamson, National Alliance for Mental Illness of Massachusetts

Staff:

Scott Taberner, Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Kevin Maccioli, Middlesex Sheriff's Office
David Bratton, Middlesex Sheriff's Office
Liz Berman, Senator Friedman's Office
Elizabeth Ganz, Association for Behavioral Healthcare
Michael Kane, ForHealth Consulting at UMass Chan Medical School
Chelsea Thomson, ForHealth Consulting at UMass Chan Medical School

Invited Attendees:

Jean Yang, Vinfen
Kim Shellenberger, Vinfen
Katie Tyler, Vinfen
Sophie Hansen, Vinfen
David Brown, Vinfen
Jonathan Chines, Vinfen
Muriel Kramer, Vinfen

Welcome and Roll Call

- Co-Chair Sheriff Koutoujian welcomed attendees and opened the meeting. Chelsea Thomson completed a roll call of Commission members.

Approval of Minutes from Last Meeting

- Sheriff Koutoujian accepted a motion made by Senator Friedman and seconded by Danna Mauch to approve the meeting minutes from the last meeting held on November 17, 2025. Sheriff Koutoujian conducted a vote of the yeas and nays. All those present and voting voted in the affirmative. The Commission approved the meeting minutes.

Commission Focus

- Danna Mauch notes that after the Restoration Center is operational on April 1, 2026, the Commission's role will shift and focus on tasks such as the evaluation, monitoring emerging operational challenges, and policy work while continuing to identify and secure funding for the pilot. Future meetings will focus on the evaluation and associated next steps.

Vinfen Implementation Updates

Facility

- Vinfen is on track to receive occupancy by March 13th and open on April 1st.

Services

- Since starting Mobile Respite in August 2025, Vinfen served 24 unique individuals to date. In some cases, Vinfen has leveraged the flexibility of the program to extend stays beyond 30 days to make necessary community connections prior to program discharge.

Staffing

- Vinfen has hired 56% of the necessary staff for the Restoration Center and will be fully staffed by April 1st. Dr. Jesse Gaeta also joined Vinfen as a consultant to bring their expertise standing up the Supportive Place for Observation and Treatment (SPOT) program at Boston Health Care for the Homeless to the project.

Law Enforcement and Community Engagement

- Vinfen drafted a Universal Principles of Care document to establish clear, standardized procedures and shared expectations between law enforcement agencies and Vinfen to ensure the safe and effective transfer of individuals in crisis to the Restoration Center. Vinfen met with the Greater Lowell Chiefs of Police to discuss this document at the end of January and will present it during the Middlesex County Chiefs meeting at the end of February.
- Vinfen continues to meet with the Greater Lowell Chiefs of Police to strengthen policies and coordination, letting the Chiefs set the cadence of meetings and information sharing. Vinfen will communicate with officers at the operational level, through roll calls, to ensure front line staff understand the Center's capacity and who to call with questions. Vinfen will also set up processes to respond to situations and share lessons learned with police departments. Chief Frost has been an integral part of Vinfen's law enforcement engagement work and Vinfen has vetted all ideas through Chief Frost before sharing with any other justice partners, which they will continue to do.
- Vinfen will set up a walkthrough for law enforcement leaders, prior to the Center's opening, so that they can ask questions, see the space, and share their concerns.

Evaluation

- Vinfen and ForHealth Consulting worked together over the past two years to develop a data sharing process and finalize an evaluation plan.

Licensure

- Vinfen met with relevant state licensing agencies to discuss the Restoration Center model and potential licensure requirements. Vinfen will open the Restoration Center on April 1st without a license and if the model evolves to be more clinical in nature, Vinfen will discuss any possible licenses with the Department of Public Health.

Ambulance Drop-off

- Barriers remain to ambulance drop-off at the Restoration Center, including the need to change Office of Emergency Services' (OEMS) regulations to allow for drop-off at the Center, similar to the change that allows for drop-off at the Community Behavioral Health Centers (CBHCs). The Department of Public Health also needs to finalize the plan of entry for CBHCs. The draft plan requires the CBHC to secure a clinic license with medical use designation, have 24/7 nurse staffing, and an ability to prescribe certain medications, on-site, 24/7. Vinfen believes that the Restoration Center would also need to meet these requirements, of which the Center will only meet the 24/7 nursing criteria upon opening. The Restoration Center model would need to be revised to satisfy the other two requirements. To date, no CBHCs are accepting drop-offs, mainly due to the financial cost to meet the criteria.
- Vinfen staff visited the Supportive Place for Observation and Treatment (SPOT) program at Boston Health Care for the Homeless to learn about the model and ambulance drop-off process. Squad 80 drops off one to two people a month and can do so because the city manages the ambulance company and is able to absorb the costs for those drop-offs. The SPOT program also utilizes mobile integrated health, a process whereby an ambulance company can apply to OEMS to allow for drop-off at alternate locations to the emergency department. At the onset of the program, EMTs shadowed SPOT program staff to better understand the patient flow and service provision.
- In addition to the regulatory and policy challenges, no mechanism exists to pay for private ambulance drop-offs at locations other than the emergency department.

Critical Milestones

- Vinfen outlined the pre-launch activities currently underway including: finalizing a determination on licensure (completed), completing facility construction, finalizing law enforcement universal principles of care, completing the Executive Office of Health and Human Services readiness review, recruiting and training staff, and establishing licensure (application submitted) and MAP certification for Respite.
- During the post-launch stabilization, Vinfen will focus on operational stability, collaboration with key community partners, identifying opportunities for ambulance drop-off pathways, evaluating initial outcomes, and continuing to pursue funding opportunities.
- Vinfen will also focus on longer term planning that includes operational maturation and expanded community engagement, demonstrating success in coordination with ForHealth's evaluation, evaluating long-term licensing options, and executing a successor contract.

Ribbon Cutting Event Preparations

- Vinfen, in partnership with Spectrum, will host a ribbon cutting and open house event at the Restoration Center on March 31st. The event will include a speaking program, ribbon cutting ceremony, and guided tours of the Restoration Center and Spectrum space.
- Vinfen has coordinated across the involved entities during biweekly communications and social media meetings. The group developed a social media plan which includes a video walkthrough of the Center.
- Commission leadership discussed the goals of the event, with a focus on celebrating and recognizing the work to date and staff who have been instrumental, providing support for community members who need it, and undertaking an evaluation to understand the Center's impact.

Funding and Budget Update

- Scott Taberner noted that Vinfen reviewed their budget and reduced the overall requested funding amount by \$1.1 million, for a total revised contract amount of \$18.5 million.
- Sophie Hansen announced that Vinfen received \$750,000 in Congressional Directed Spending (CDS) resources from Senators Warren and Markey that they applied for in federal fiscal year 2025.
- Scott Taberner and Chelsea Thomson provided an overview of the funding received to date and the variance between the total contract amount. With the recent CDS funds, the budget is fully funded through the end of fiscal year 2027, leaving a gap of approximately \$4.7 million through the end of the pilot period. Scott and Chelsea have worked closely with Vinfen and Commission leadership to identify possible sources of funding, including general appropriations, Opioid Recovery and Remediation Fund resources, and Department of Mental Health support. Recognizing the challenging financial environment, no funding sources are taken for granted.
- Senator Friedman, Sheriff Koutoujian, and Danna Mauch discussed potential pathways to secure funding from the private sector, including local hospitals, private payers, and philanthropies. In other jurisdictions, hospitals have provided support for similarly situated centers as they can reduce demand for emergency room services. Commission members and Vinfen also discussed private and public payer funding for services, which would be contingent on developing the model into a billable service(s). Commission members agreed to dedicate effort into identifying private sources of funding over the next year.

Next Steps

- Sheriff Koutoujian and Vinfen will discuss how the Sheriff can support the Center and ribbon cutting event during his time on Teddy Panos' InsideLowell segment.
- Vinfen will keep Sheriff Koutoujian apprised of the date for the law enforcement walk through so that the Sheriff and staff can attend.

Adjournment

- Co-chair Sheriff Koutoujian accepted motion made by Eliza Williamson and seconded by Senator Friedman to adjourn the meeting. Sheriff Koutoujian conducted a vote of the yeas and nays. All those present and voting voted in the affirmative. The meeting was adjourned.