MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH COUNCIL

Meeting of June 22, 2023

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

**PUBLIC HEALTH COUNCIL MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

**Henry I. Bowditch Public Health Council Room, 2nd Floor 250 Washington Street, Boston MA**

**Docket: \*\*\*REMOTE MEETING\*\*\* Thursday, June 22, 2023 – 1:00PM**

***Note: The June Public Health Council meeting will be held remotely as a video conference consistent with St. 2021, c. 20, s. 20, which provides for certain modifications to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law.***

Members of the public may listen to the meeting proceedings by using the information below:

Join by Web:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82564723214?pwd=OGhtTFNBNjlzS1RuWXJSS2JXRnpjQT09>

Dial in Telephone Number: 646-931-3860 Webinar ID: 825 6472 3214

Passcode: 424104

1. **ROUTINE ITEMS**
   1. Introductions.
   2. Updates from Commissioner Robert Goldstein.
      * Review Data from the Biannual Opioid Report.
   3. Record of the Public Health Council Meeting held May 17, 2023 **(Vote)**.
2. **INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATIONS**
   1. Overview of the Bureau of Health Professions Licensure.

*The Commissioner and the Public Health Council are defined by law as constituting the Department of Public Health. The Council has one regular meeting per month. These meetings are open to public attendance except when the Council meets in Executive Session. The Council’s meetings are not hearings, nor do members of the public have a right to speak or address the Council. The docket will indicate whether or not floor discussions are anticipated. For purposes of fairness since the regular meeting is not a hearing and is not advertised as such, presentations from the floor may require delaying a decision until a subsequent meeting.*

Attendance and Summary of Votes:

Presented below is a summary of the meeting, including timekeeping, attendance and votes cast.

Date of Meeting: June 22, 2023

Start Time: 1:05 pm Ending Time: 2:51 pm

| **Board Member** | **Attended** | **First Order:**  **Approval of**  **May 17, 2023**  **Meeting Minutes**  **(Vote)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Commissioner Robert Goldstein** | Yes | Yes |
| **Edward Bernstein** | Yes | Yes |
| **Lissette Blondet** | Yes | Yes |
| **Kathleen Carey** | Yes | Abstain |
| **Elizabeth Chen** | Yes | Abstain |
| **Harold Cox** | Yes | Yes |
| **Alba Cruz-Davis** | No | Absent |
| **Michele David** | No | Absent |
| **Robert Engell** | Yes | Abstain |
| **Elizabeth Evans** | Yes | Abstain |
| **Eduardo Haddad** | No | Absent |
| **Joanna Lambert** | Yes | Abstain |
| **Stewart Landers** | Yes | Yes |
| **Mary Moscato** | Yes | Yes |
| **Gregory Volturo** | Yes | Yes |
| **Summary** | 12 Members Present;  3 Members Absent | 8 Members Approved;  4 Abstained  3 Absent |

**PROCEEDINGS**

A regular meeting of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health’s Public Health Council (M.G.L. c. 17, §§ 1, 3) was held on Thursday, June 22, 2023, by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, 250 Washington Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02108.

Members present were: Commissioner Robert Goldstein; Edward Bernstein, MD; Lissette Blondet; Kathleen Carey; Secretary Elizabeth Chen; Dean Harold Cox; Robert Engell; Elizabeth Evans; Joanna Lambert; Stewart Landers; Mary Moscato; and Gregory Volturo, MD.

Also in attendance was Beth McLaughlin, Acting General Counsel at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

Commissioner Goldstein called the meeting to order at 1:05 pm and made opening remarks before reviewing the docket.

**1. ROUTINE ITEMS**

*b. Updates from Commissioner Robert Goldstein*

Commissioner Goldstein proceeded to update the council on the following:

**New Member – Robert Engell**

Commissioner Goldstein welcomed Robert Engell to the Public Health Council, mentioning his 30-year career as a health care executive, his years of service in the Massachusetts Air National Guard, and his current role as the Executive Director of Homes and Housing for the Executive Office of Veteran’s Services.

**Award – Kevin Cranston**

Commissioner Goldstein announced Kevin Cranston, Assistant Commissioner and Director of the Bureau of Infectious Disease and Laboratory Sciences was presented the Paul Revere Award, the Massachusetts Public Health Association’s highest Honor. He then offered an overview of Mr. Cranston’s dedicated and lengthy career in Public Health.

**Award – Victor Ortiz**

Next, Commissioner Goldstein announced Victor Ortiz, Director of Problem Gambling Services, was awarded the Dr. Joseph W. Ciarrocchi Award. This award is presented by the Maryland Council on Problem Gambling’s Board of Directors to honor a problem gambling advocate and leader who demonstrates excellence in research, clinical services, prevention, and awareness of problem gambling.

**LGBTQ+ Pride**

Commissioner Goldstein mentioned that DPH participated in two Pride events during June, Pride Month, an opportunity to celebrate and commit to work necessary to protect LGBTQ+ rights.

**Summer Safety**

With warmer weather coming, Commissioner Goldstein noted the annual precautions issued by DPH to address mosquito and tick bites, water safety, and other activities.

**Morton Street Announcement**

Commissioner Goldstein announced the Healey-Driscoll Administration is provisionally designating Boston Medical Center and its partners for the redevelopment of the public health campus. BMC will help determine the scope and funding for the project, a culmination of lengthy work with neighbors, elected officials, a community advisory group, advocates, and other stake holders. He described the proposed development and its end goals of meeting healthcare and related resource needs.

**Discussion**

Commissioner Goldstein paused to ask if there were any questions or comments before he moved to the next topic.

Several of the Council members remarked upon the achievements and deserved recognition of both Kevin Cranston and Victor Ortiz.

Mr. Landers, brought to the attention of the Council the scheduled closing of the Sumner Tunnel, effectively closing off the neighborhoods of East Boston and North Shore communities. Although there are alternative routes, he said in the past they have proved congested and problematic. He encouraged the department to stay in close touch with the city, EMS services, and Mass DOT to ensure a clear pathway for medical emergencies.

Commissioner Goldstein assured the Council that there is open and ongoing communication between the Department and Boston EMS.

With no more comments, the Commissioner moved to the next topic.

**Organizational Update**

Commissioner Goldstein presented a new and restructured organizational chart and priorities for DPH and offered feedback from the Council members.

Dean Cox felt that the new reorganization still did not demonstrate a clear connection between DPH and the local public health departments.

Commissioner Goldstein agreed that the work of local and regional public health boards is vital to the goals of DPH. He said he hoped that by bringing the Office of Regional and Local Health under the direction of the Commissioner, it will help communication and implementation of resources.

Ms. Blondet said that the new priorities and organization presented is a hopeful sign to her and her colleagues. She hoped that each entity of the new reorganization demonstrates the goals and priorities issued from the Commissioner’s office such as equity, workforce development, climate change and that these values will not rest only at the top. She said she would also like to see better communication between bureaus instead of bureaus working independently. She said currently Community Health Workers are focused through the Bureau of Community Health and Prevention and does not understand why there is not participation of Community Health Workers in all agencies of DPH.

Dr. Volturo was pleased to see climate change included as a priority in the Commissioner’s goals.

Mr. Landers commented positively toward the new organizational chart specifically mentioning the Deputy Commissioner for Healthcare, and the Assistant Commissioner for Equity as good additions.

Ms. Moscato believed that the addition of the Deputy Commissioner for Healthcare and its departments will help strengthen DPH.

Dr. Bernstein felt that the importance of public health is not understood well by the public and there should be more outreach to the public to help them understand the necessity and the work provided by public health for their benefit. Separately, he reminded the Council of the danger of hospital overcrowding and lack of beds for mental health. He believed that this is a true crisis and needs priority concern.

Commissioner Goldstein said that the Department is elevating the role of communication, focusing on making the public aware of what, how, and why we do this work.

With no more comments, the Commissioner moved to the next topic.

**Opioid Report**

The Commissioner presented new data related to the opioid epidemic including rates of overdose deaths based upon race, ethnicity, region, and sex. He then spoke of next steps that DPH is taking to address this new data.

Commissioner Goldstein asked if there were any questions or comments about the report.

Secretary Chen expressed that after each occurrence of overdose data reporting she feels discouraged that the numbers only get worse. She asked if there is data presented from any community or other states, that may reflect a more positive outcome.

Commissioner Goldstein agreed that the numbers are discouraging and alarming but mentioned the committed and dedicated work provided by so many across the Commonwealth. He said the full report that will be available on-line does show some encouraging data from some communities. He called upon Deirdre Calvert, Director of Bureau of Substance Addiction Services to offer input.

Ms. Calvert also noted the many hardworking people in the Substance Addiction field; she spoke of the toxic drug supply adding to overdose and death and spoke emphatically about the stigma and discrimination toward people using substances. As a result of this stigma, progress is slowed, and resources are not always approved.

Ms. Lambert asked if there were any initiatives to control the fentanyl supply.

Commissioner Goldstein said that the Commonwealth has started a program to improve access to fentanyl test strips.

Ms. Calvert spoke of harm reduction and mentioned that federal regulations have loosened restrictions on the use of methadone as a treatment.

Mr. Landers agreed that the stigma attached to substance-use disorder needs to be addressed and the public needs to be educated about the illness. He was concerned by the data regarding rural areas in the Commonwealth and asked how that was being addressed.

Ms. Calvert said access to transportation and other resources in the rural areas makes treatment difficult. She said the Overdose Prevention Hotline will be expanded as an intervention. Also, mobile methadone vans are being considered.

Dr. Volturo said after billions of dollars have been spent on attempting to prevent drugs from entering the country, we must focus and spend on treatment. He asked if safe injection facilities which help prevent overdoses, and to help connect with treatment, have been considered in Massachusetts.

Commissioner Goldstein said that DPH will present by the end of the year a feasibility report on overdose prevention sites.

Dr. Bernstein spoke of medical policy change to bring methadone into the practice of medicine and social policy change. He felt that mandatory reporting laws were harmful to post-partum women because they may lose their child if treatment drugs are found in their system. He said agencies should work together, with awareness of the social determinants of health within the treatment system.

Ms. Evans said she supports the idea of low barrier access to methadone and buprenorphine, especially in the courts and probation.

With no further questions, Commissioner Goldstein turned to the docket.

**1****. ROUTINE ITEMS**

*c. May 17, 2023 Minutes* ***(Vote)***

Commissioner Goldstein asked if there were any changes to the May 17, 2023, minutes. There were none.

Commissioner Goldstein asked if there was a motion to approve the May 17, 2023, minutes.

Ms. Moscato made the motion, which was seconded by Dr. Volturo. Ms. Carey, Secretary Chen, Mr. Engell, and Ms. Evans abstained. All other present members approved.

**2. INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATIONS**

1. *Overview of the Bureau of Health Professions Licensure*

Commissioner Goldstein invited Jim Lavery, Director of the Bureau of Health Professions Licensure (BHPL) to provide an update on the Bureau. Also in attendance was Timothy St. Laurent, BHPL Deputy Director, and Lauren Nelson, BHPL Deputy Director.

Upon the conclusion of the presentation, Commissioner Goldstein asked the council members if there were any questions or comments.

Ms. Blondet mentioned the sometimes dissonant relationship with BHPL and the Massachusetts Association of Community Health Workers, citing the unique aspect of who many of the community health workers are. She mentioned an example of BHPL mandating CORI checks on community health workers for certification as they do with all other professions, but stated that many community health workers have records, but are now engaged, active community workers. Because of this she said, only 1,000 of the 5,000 CHWs are certified. She did however commend Jim Lavery and BHPL broadly for their collaboration and willingness to listen to this workforce.

Ms. Carey asked what the main challenges are moving forward, now that BHPL has increased the number of its boards by 20%.

Mr. Lavery said not all boards are quite transitioned yet but communication amongst boards and professional organizations will be important.

Mr. Engell asked about licensing reciprocity between states to help encourage a healthier workforce.

Mr. Lavery said they have supported the Nursing compact. They made changes during the pandemic to make it easier for licensed professionals to come to the state to work. Also, they are reviewing the application process to streamline it. Reciprocity is written into statutes that may have to be reviewed.

Mr. Engell asked what metrics were available to demonstrate success rates from point of application to licensure, and length of time from application to licensure.

Mr. St. Laurent said the Quality Improvement Team worked very hard in obtaining metrics and has dashboards on each of the boards. Boards that are still paper-based are taking up to 30 days for licensure. Once all paperwork is received, it takes one to three days for licensure. Once the Board goes paperless, the 30 day waiting period will be reduced.

Mr. Lavery said with renewals it is almost instantaneous.

Mr. Landers questioned the current status of the boards concerning vacant positions and also the focus upon equity hiring withing the boards.

Mr. Lavery said that equity is built into what they are doing. All the boards are working to fill empty seats.

Mr. St. Laurent said they have tracked equity to help with recruitment. Mr. St. Laurent stated that BHPL has a new form that each board member completes when appointed that asks for their race and ethnicity. The data from this form will assist in nominating diverse boards within BHPL.

Dr. Bernstein had questions about retention and aging out of the workforce.

Mr. Lavery said licensing does not keep data on those that leave the workforce or retire from it.

Dr. Bernstein asked if there was data about those leaving the state or those coming in. He felt having that type of data would help to understand the workforce problem.

Mr. Lavery said there is not a “retirement status” in many of the boards. He used the example of nurses who stay licensed even though they may not be actively working. He offered to look into what may be available for data.

With no further questions, Commissioner Goldstein stated that this concluded the final agenda item for the day and reminded the council that the next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, July 12, 2023, at 9 AM.

Commissioner Goldstein asked if there was a motion to adjourn.

Dr. Bernstein made the motion which was seconded by Dr. Volturo. All present members approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:51 pm.