



**Middlesex County Restoration Center
Monday, February 22, 2021
10:30 am – 12:00 pm
Zoom**

MINUTES

Attendees: Danna Mauch, Massachusetts Association for Mental Health, co-chair; Senator Cindy Friedman; Representative Ken Gordon; Chief Robert Bongiorno, Bedford Police Department; Nancy Connolly, Department of Mental Health; Deirdre Calvert, Bureau of Substance Addiction Services; Scott Taberner, MassHealth; Marisa Hebble, MA Trial Court; Lydia Conley, Association for Behavioral Healthcare; Eliza Williamson, National Alliance for Mental Illness Massachusetts; Tim Burton, National Alliance for Mental Illness Massachusetts; Senator John Cronin; Kevin Bowe, member of the public; Dave Ryan, MSO; David Swanson, Office of Senator Cindy Friedman; Catia Sharp, MAMH; June Binney, member of the public.

10:30 AM: WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Danna Mauch called the meeting to order.

10:35 AM: LEGISLATIVE AND BUDGET UPDATE

Senator Friedman announced that she filed the bill to create a Trust Fund for the Commission this session, and the bill number is 585 on the Senate side.

Representative Gordon let the Commission know that the House is preparing for the budget.

10:40 AM: APPROVING THE MINUTES FROM THE LAST MEETING

Senator Friedman motioned to approve the minutes from the last meeting, as well as the minutes from the Executive Session. The vote was unanimous in favor of approving the minutes.

10:45 AM: DISCUSSION OF PROJECT CITIZEN PRESENTATION

Danna Mauch opened the discussion on the Project Citizen presentation from the January meeting by remarking that it was an inspiring presentation.

Scott Taberner asked if there are any other PACT¹-like programs in other Houses of Correction or at the Department of Correction in Massachusetts.

Dave Ryan responded that the Suffolk County House of Correction does, but that he is not aware of any others.

Marisa Hebble asked if the Suffolk County unit is run the same as PACT.

Dave Ryan responded that Vinny Schiraldi from the Columbia Justice Lab worked with Suffolk in the design of their unit, while Vera worked with the Middlesex Sheriff's Office.

Senator Friedman said that she thought it was a really excellent presentation. These are people who wouldn't necessarily benefit from the Restoration Center because they are already incarcerated, but the Commission shouldn't forget about them and needs to support them on their road to recovery. This falls outside the Commission's purview but provides good ideas about the Commission needs to be doing to support people – housing, community services, etc.

Danna Mauch asked the Commission members what they learned in that presentation that might inform how the Commission focuses on that younger age group in the design and implementation of the Restoration Center. She asked how the Restoration Center can most effectively be an alternative for these young men?

Scott Taberner let the Commission know that MassHealth has issued a procurement for the Community Support Program for Behavioral Health for Justice-Involved individuals last week. The program is modeled off the pilot MassHealth ran with Middlesex House of Corrections. [COMMBUYS - Bid Solicitation](#)

Danna Mauch asked Nancy Connolly if she had any comments about diversion programs at DMH and other places that might help these young men.

¹ People Achieving Change Together, the name of the specialized unit in the Billerica Jail and House of Corrections which houses young men and is managed using restorative justice techniques and offers specialized programming.

Nancy Connolly responded that the things these young men needed were not specifically behavioral health services – housing for example seemed to be the primary issue. What is the Commission looking to provide to people for diversion services. Is it only behavioral health services, or would it include wrap-around social services?

Danna Mauch said that the Restoration Center is targeted at people with behavioral health conditions, but the conversation with those young men reminded her that the needs for housing, community supports, and other things are central to diversion, and so the Restoration Center will need to do linkages to those critical support services.

Senator Friedman added that for the young men who spoke to the Commission in January, their life stories are steeped in trauma, and the Commission can't ignore that. We ignore the mental health needs of people when doing social services and vice versa. It's critical what we do for people to address the full spectrum of needs for people with trauma. If we just detox someone and send them on their way it isn't enough. The Commission has to tackle the housing and other support needs.

Danna Mauch asked Deirdre Calvert about her work with trauma as an underlying need of people with substance use conditions.

Deirdre said that the Department of Public Health has an RFR that closed on Friday for black and Latino men being released from prison – this is a population that is dying at an increased rate from opioid overdose. It is based on the Uplifting Fathers program. She also described a Housing First initiative at the Department of Public Health. She said that this is the first time they are supporting housing. Many people who are chronically relapsing are being excluded from housing. 60 beds are coming online, and sobriety is not a requirement. They are hoping to add more beds. This is currently targeted in Suffolk County in the Melnea Cass Boulevard area. They are also looking to start doing more preventative work before people are housing unstable.

Danna Mauch asked Eliza about the needs for housing for the people who call the Compass Helpline. What role can the Restoration Center play in connecting people to housing?

Eliza Williamson said that housing is the number one call type on the Compass Helpline. Beyond access to mental health services, there is a problem accessing services for social determinants of health. Eliza doesn't have a clear sense of what to do about that, but the Restoration Center will need to have people who are better able to facilitate support and access to housing because in addition to having not enough housing supports,

people don't know how to access the supports that exist – how to get the forms, who to talk to, etc.

Danna Mauch responded that this is confirming that housing is an important unmet need and a high-volume need.

Marisa Hebble added that when the Commission went out to Bexar County to look at their services there was not only the Haven for Hope housing complex but a multi-service center where community navigators and service providers could come and provide services to people at the crisis center. We know that all these other issues are so interwoven into the needs of this population. The Commission will need to co-locate other services like housing, food security, financial services, etc.

Danna Mauch agreed, adding that at a minimum the Restoration Center will need case managers who can do these connections. One of the tasks in the next stage of implementation planning might be to define the landscape of multi-service and targeted service providers who have cooperative agreements with the Restoration Center provider to help do this navigation.

Senator Friedman said what a luxury it would be to have that kind of multi-service center co-located. She asked what the core, fundamental resources are that need to be in place right at the beginning. She noted that clearly housing support is one. But also how to become a DMH client, because that process is very difficult and very opaque. She wondered if there is a way to say how to access existing state resources for people, and how to identify the services and resources and then help people navigate into those systems. DMH services for DMH clients are very comprehensive. How does the Restoration Center help people get that.

Nancy Connolly said that the forensic transition team works in correctional facilities to help people get services before release. Maybe the Restoration Center can model off of that.

Senator Friedman said that she hears a lot about the challenges with access that service. She thought the Commission should think about how it can change that or how to access it most efficiently.

Danna Mauch mentioned that she had been helping someone get DMH services over the weekend. She noted that what is in the regulations is data points that are criteria for getting SMH services like that the client has to have serious mental illness. The type of information that isn't in the written regulations is what you really need to do to qualify, like how long you have to be diagnosed, etc. We need to make those pieces more accessible for people so that can take those initial steps of getting access to services. It isn't clear when you're going through the process

how the judgment will be made. The restoration Center will also be seeing people who don't qualify for DMH services and those people need their needs met too.

Lydia Conley added that most people don't meet the DMH criteria. She also asked how to weave in housing. She asked what the Behavioral Health Roadmap to Reform being released by the Executive Office for Health and Human Services is going to look like, and how this fits into that.

Danna Mauch added that for DMH clients, there is DMH Rental Subsidy Program (RSP) for housing. For non-DMH clients, there are traditional forms of housing supports like the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP). But many people aren't able to navigate those programs. ABH member Advocates is great at it; how do others meet that need. How does the Restoration Center do that.

Lydia Conley mentioned that there are supposed to be community-based locations in the Behavioral Health Roadmap to Reform. What will these locations be able to provide? How do they integrate into the Restoration Center.

Danna Mauch responded that she thinks they are expected to have crisis services, which will make it key to integrate a Restoration Center with these locations. She also said it is key to integrate mental health and substance use into a single space because so many people have overlapping diagnoses. Also homelessness will be a big issue from an integration perspective. Danna asked Chief Bongiorno if he has comments on this.

Chief Bongiorno said that there are large parts of the county where homelessness is a major challenge. The Restoration Center will be a great addition to the county to handle those kinds of problems.

Danna Mauch agreed. She said some amount of linkage with shelters is therefore needed as well to facilitate services.

Chief Bongiorno said that the Senator hit it spot-on earlier. He said we shouldn't focus on the reentry program because it is out of scope. But the Restoration Center could be more proactive. His question was if the resources were available, would we be in the situation we are in now. The services should be front-loaded into the Restoration Center to prevent incarceration so we don't have to worry as much about reentry.

Senator Friedman added that this is why housing is so important – if you don't have a place to live, that won't send you back to jail/prison again.

Representative Gordon said that the investigative trips the Commission has been taking have all had examples of programs with wrap-around housing supports. It isn't necessarily the core service function we are looking at, but it is a critical element.

Chief Bongiorno added that the Restoration Center would have been a great stop for clients who need vaccinations.

Senator Friedman noted that this might bring more equity to vaccine distribution.

Marisa Hebble noted that she hoped that this would not be the last time the Commission hears from people with lived experience of the type the Commission is trying to address, because it is so important.

Marisa also noted that for people who have children, that's a unique set of needs that the Commission hasn't talked much about. The Restoration Center should connect with the family resource centers, The thing that often prevents people from getting into care is that they have kids, so the Commission should think about how that impacts people's decisions.

Danna Mauch said that this was an excellent point.

Senator Friedman thought that this is why there needs to be a list of critical elements of a Restoration Center. Bexar County was amazing – even the part where you could just come in and be homeless and receive services. We need the list of things we are focusing on, even through partnerships. We ought to use this list for the procurement because the need is enormous on every level and it can be overwhelming.

Danna Mauch said that one of the tasks that should be a first order of business is to go back into the reports and studies and tease out those critical elements that would represent a very comprehensive program. Then determine which will happen inside the Center, and which will happen through affiliation. Then the Commission can establish those elements of service that will happen out the gate through the procurement.

11:15 AM: UPDATE ON ESTABLISHING A SUBCOMMITTEE ON PROCUREMENT

Catia Sharp provided a list of Commission members who had expressed interest in participating in a subcommittee on procurement, which included Marisa Hebble, Eliza Williamson, and Scott Taberner.

Lydia Conley asked about the rules, and whether ABH could participate given that their members are likely to bid on the procurement.

Catia Sharp asked Scott Taberner to follow up on this, and told Lydia they would circle back with an answer from the lawyers.

Senator Friedman said that someone who knows what this looks like on the front-lines should participate, like Chief Bongiorno.

Chief Bongiorno agreed to join the subcommittee.

Nancy Connolly said she would find a DMH staff person to join the subcommittee.

Tim Burton from NAMI Mass volunteered to participate in the subcommittee as well.

11:30 AM: UPDATE ON WORK PLAN FOR FY21

Danna Mauch asked Catia Sharp to provide an update on the work plan.

Catia Sharp asked Scott Taberner to describe the flow of funds under the new line item for the Commission funding.

Scott Taberner said that EOHHS is working on an Intergovernmental Service Agreement (ISA) with Commonwealth Medicine to find a home for the resources that are named in the line item for the Restoration Center. He said that these entities are working to understand the timeline for procurement, given that there are only 4 months left in the fiscal year to spend the funds. Speed will be of the essence to get a design together and get the actual procurement out.

Danna Mauch said that the subcommittee can meet a couple of times over the next few weeks to tee up documents and drafts for Commonwealth Medicine's review and refinement. If the subcommittee can refine the list of priority activities for the scope of work and key criteria for evaluation of bids, that could be turned over to EOHHS and Commonwealth Medicine and plunked into a procurement document. This would create a solid starting point for action.

Scott Taberner thought this was an excellent idea.

Danna Mauch said that the Commission can target taking action on the recommendations of the subcommittee at the next Commission meeting.

Scott Taberner noted that Katharine London at Commonwealth Medicine would be getting involved in the project.

Danna Mauch said that she has worked extensively with Katharine London, and she is incredibly knowledgeable and cares deeply about the people we are trying to divert, so she will be a great support in this effort. She noted that Katharine is also working on the Behavioral Health Roadmap to Reform, so to the extent that the Restoration Center can be linked to that effort, she will be able to help with that.

Scott Taberner added that Commonwealth Medicine brings a lot more people who are doing work on these other projects – the behavioral health Roadmap, Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy, etc. – and it is an impressive array of work to divert people from justice involvement so this will provide a lot of synergy.

Chief Bongiorno advocated for comfort dogs in this type of work. His department recently got a comfort dog, and when the dog is in their building, it has a very calming effect on the employees. It's used for therapeutic sessions in police departments, correctional settings, etc. Long-range, one of those comfort animals might be a good fit for the Restoration Center.

Danna Mauch said this was a great idea. She added that the Framingham women's prison has a program where the women train comfort dogs.

Eliza Williamson added that in the 90's she worked with adolescents on the North Shore who were court-involved in group living settings, and had a service dog. She mentioned it was unbelievable the impact the dog had on these people's ability to function. She was asked to bring the dog to court with people so they could remember to breathe and so on. She thought this was an excellent idea as well.

Chief Bongiorno wondered aloud if a person from the correctional institute could come talk about the impact of comfort dogs at a meeting.

Danna Mauch said she would be happy to try and track that down.

Dave Ryan added that the MSO has a service dog, and he could talk to Sheriff Koutoujian about having someone from the MSO come talk about it at a meeting.

Chief Bongiorno said that during COVID, access to pets has really changed employee morale in the Bedford Police Department.

11:50 AM: NEXT STEPS AND CLOSING

Danna Mauch adjourned the meeting.