

Massachusetts Special Commission on State Institutions

Meeting Minutes

June 1, 2023

3:00 - 5:00 pm

Date of meeting: Thursday, June 1, 2023

Start time: 3:05 pm

End time: 4:50 pm

Location: Virtual Meeting (Zoom)

Member Name / Seat	Vote 1*	Vote 2	Vote 3
Evelyn Mateo (co-chair) – Department of Mental Health (DMH)	X	X	X
Matthew Millett (co-chair) – Department of Developmental Services (DDS)	X	X	X
Elisa Aronne – Wrentham Developmental Center	-	-	-
Kate Benson – DMH	X	X	X
Reggie Clark – Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong (MASS)	X	X	X
J. Michael Comeau – Secretary of State, Archives Division	X	X	X
Anne Fracht – DDS	X	X	X
Alex Green – The Arc of Massachusetts	X	X	X
Rania Kelly – MassFamilies	X	X	X
Richard Krant – Wrentham Developmental Center	-	-	-
Andrew Levrault – Disabled Persons Protection Commission	X	X	X
Mary Mahon McCauley – Massachusetts Office on Disability	X	X	X
Vesper Moore – Kiva Centers	X	X	X
Brenda Rankin – Wrentham Developmental Center	X	X	X
June Sauvageau – Northeast Independent Living Program	-	-	-
Mary-Louise White – DMH	X	X	X

* (X) Voted in favor; (O) Opposed; (A) Abstained from vote; (-) Absent from meeting or during vote

Proceedings

Matthew Millett, Commission Co-chair, called the meeting of the Special Commission on State Institutions (herein referred to as the “Commission”) to order at 3:05 pm. He welcomed members and explained that DDS Commissioner Jane Ryder appointed him to the Commission and named him one of the two co-chairs along with Ms. Evelyn Mateo who was appointed by DMH Commissioner Brooke Doyle. Co-chair Millett informed members that the Commission meeting is subject to the Open Meeting Law and that any votes taken during the meeting would be conducted via roll-call vote.

Sreya Sudireddy with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) administered the oath of office to members.

Lauren Cleary, Associate General Counsel for EOHHS, provided an overview of the Open Meeting Law (OML). She explained the limitations related to Commission members' communications outside of a formal Commission meeting on matters which might pertain to the Commission's work. She emphasized the importance of transparency and explained that documents and minutes from the Commission's meetings are part of the public record. In response to a member's question regarding the possibility of recording meetings, Ms. Cleary explained that the materials and minutes from the meetings could be shared, but she would need to confirm whether meetings were permitted to be recorded.

David Giannotti, Public Education and Communications Division Chief within the State Ethics Commission, provided the Commission with a brief overview of the State's conflict of interest and ethics regulations. He explained that members of the Commission are considered special state employees and are required to complete conflict of interest trainings upon joining the Commission and every other year thereafter. He detailed the restrictions placed on members by the nature of their service on the Commission and stressed that members should view the State Ethics Commission as a resource and should not hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns related to potential conflicts of interest and any required disclosures. He clarified that members of the Commission who are currently employed by the Commonwealth receive their ethics trainings through their state agency and would not have to retake their ethics training for their service on this Commission. He noted that Commission members who are newly appointed special employees will need to take the online conflict of interest training. In response to a member's question regarding whether training materials would be in "people first" or easy to read language, Mr. Giannotti indicated he would need to look into the matter. Meghan McEvoy, Strategy Manager with EOHHS, indicated that she would help coordinate the trainings for new members. Ms. Cleary mentioned that Jennifer Barthelemy from EOHHS may be helpful.

Co-Chair Millett provided a brief overview of the responsibilities of the Commission, reading through the Commission's legislative charge. He noted that the Commission was established to study and report on the history of state institutions for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities or mental health conditions in the Commonwealth. He explained that the Commission is required to submit a report with its findings and recommendations to the Legislature no later than June 1, 2025.

Mr. Green provided a brief history of the legislation that created the Commission, highlighting the work that community leaders and advocates have taken to ensure people with disabilities buried on the grounds of state institutions receive proper burial markings and identification. He cited immediate needs for the Commission to create bylaws and hire staff, given the expansive charge of the Commission, and emphasized the importance of the Commission partnering with the Massachusetts Archives, which he noted historically has been a valuable resource.

Co-chairs Mateo and Millett invited members to briefly introduce themselves, their respective affiliations, and facilitated a discussion of members' goals and expectations, which included the following:

- Overview of state institutional records maintained by the Massachusetts Archives and any available resources (*Andrew Levrault*)
- Presentation providing an in-depth look at state institutions, including their evolution, their status post closure, and tours of the grounds (*Kate Benson*)
- Zoom gatherings to see any artifacts that exist (*Kate Benson*)

- Overview of processes and protocols for managing records once a facility closes, including retention policies, storage and security policies, and management of access (*Mary-Louise White*)
- Technical and visual documentation of sites, including 3D aerials (*Rania Kelly*)
- Ensuring that people receive the right supports (*Reggie Clark*)
- Overview of laws, specifically around housing, that have been passed from the late 1980s onward that impacted state institutions (*Mary Mahon McCauley*)
- Focus on leverage other projects and initiatives that could assist with Commission's work (*Vesper Moore*)
- Members should use clear, simple language, both during meetings and in presentations (*Anne Fracht*)

Ms. Sauvageau left the meeting at approximately 4:15 pm.

Ms. Benson introduced a motion to rename the Commission to the "Donald Vitkus Commission." She explained that Donald Vitkus was a former resident of the Belchertown State School who was a staunch advocate for persons with disabilities. She noted that his story was detailed in the book "You'll Like it Here" by Ed Orzechowski. Members discussed the proposal to rename the Commission in honor of Mr. Vitkus. There appeared to be consensus that the decision should be postponed until the Commission has more information.

Vote 1 to table the discussion of renaming the Commission: Ms. McCauley made a motion to table the discussion to rename the Commission, which was seconded by Mr. Clark and approved by roll-call vote (see detailed record of votes above).

Commission members engaged in a discussion around staffing support. Mr. Green proposed forming a hiring subcommittee stating that the Commission needs staff who can strongly partner with the Massachusetts Archives. He recommended that Mr. Comeau serve on the subcommittee. Mr. Comeau informed the group he will be retiring from the Massachusetts Archives at the end of the month but someone from the Massachusetts Archives would take his seat on the Commission. Ms. McCauley suggested that the Commission would need to hire an organization that specializes in scanning historical documents. Ms. McEvoy stated that creating a subcommittee is permissible and the Commission has \$145,000 allocated for that use. Mr. Green further clarified that the funds reside with DDS and they are working on an extension to carry the funding forward into Fiscal Year 2024. Ms. Mahon McCauley, Mr. Levrault, Mr. Moore, and Mr. Comeau volunteered to be on the subcommittee.

Vote 2 to create a hiring subcommittee: Co-chair Millett made a motion to create a hiring subcommittee, which was seconded by Mr. Green and approved by roll-call vote (see detailed record of votes above).

At the conclusion of the meeting, Co-Chair Millett informed Commission members that the Commission has a webpage to post meeting materials as well as a mailbox for the public to submit general comments and questions for the Commission. The mailbox will be monitored by the individual brought on to staff the Commission, who will compile and share any questions or comments with the Commission. This individual will be scheduling additional Commission meetings in the coming months, which will be announced on the Commission's webpage. If members have any questions in the meantime, they should feel free to contact Meg McEvoy.

Vote 3 to adjourn: Ms. McCauley made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Mr. Comeau and approved by roll-call vote (see detailed record of votes above).

The meeting was adjourned at 4:50 pm.

Meeting Materials

1. Commission presentation
2. Open Meeting Law guidelines
3. Welcome document from Kate Benson