

Special Commission on State Institutions

Meeting Minutes

October 20, 2023

3:30 - 4:30 pm

Date of meeting: Friday, October 20, 2023

Start time: 3:35 pm

End time: 4:30 pm

Location: Virtual Meeting (Zoom)

Member Name / Seat	Vote 1*	Vote 2	Vote 3	Vote 4
Evelyn Mateo (co-chair) – Department of Mental Health (DMH)	X	X	X	X
Matthew Millett (co-chair) – Department of Developmental Services (DDS)	X	X	X	X
Elise Aronne – Wrentham Developmental Center	-	-	-	-
Kate Benson – DMH designee	X	X	X	X
Reggie Clark – Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong (MASS)	X	X	X	X
Anne Fracht – DDS designee	X	X	X	X
Alex Green – The Arc of Massachusetts designee	X	X	X	X
Rania Kelly – MassFamilies	X	X	X	X
Andrew Levrault – Disabled Persons Protection Commission	X	X	X	X
Mary Mahon McCauley – Massachusetts Office on Disability	-	X	X	X
Vesper Moore – Kiva Centers	-	-	-	-
Brenda Rankin – Wrentham Developmental Center	-	-	-	-
Conor Snow – Secretary of State, Archives Division	X	A	X	X
Mary-Louise White – DMH	-	-	-	-

* (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 to order at 3:35 pm. In his welcoming remarks, he reminded members that the meeting is subject to the Open Meeting Law and informed them that CART services were available for the meeting.

Mr. Millett explained that one of the members, June Sauvageau retired from the Northeast Independent Living Program and had stepped down from the Commission, so her seat is vacant. Mr. Millett also noted that Conor Snow has replaced John Hannigan as the representative from the State Archives Division.

Evelyn Mateo, Commission Co-chair, explained that a member of the Commission emailed to request changes to the minutes from the September 6 Commission meeting so they more accurately reflect the

discussion during the Commission's first meeting on June 1 when a member asked that members use plain language whenever possible in both documents and discussions.

Vote 1 to approve the 9/6/2023 meeting minutes: Ms. Mateo requested a motion to approve the minutes from the Commission's previous meeting on September 6, 2023. Ms. Kelly introduced the motion, which was seconded by Mr. Millett and approved by roll-call vote (see detailed record of votes above).

Mr. Levrault provided an update on the work of the hiring subcommittee. He explained that the group met in September and discussed four different options to arrange for administrative support (such as scheduling meetings and drafting minutes) and research support (such as reviewing archived records, exploring cemetery locations, and help drafting the Commission's report). Mr. Levrault explained that the hiring subcommittee agreed that the Center for Developmental Disability Evaluation and Research (CDDER) might be the best option for providing administrative and research support and they invited CDDER's Director, Dr. Emily Lauer, to speak with the Commission.

Director Lauer presented on CDDER's work experience and how they could potentially assist the Commission in meeting its goals.

- She explained that CDDER is part of the University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School and is independent from the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, but still part of the state system.
- Director Lauer said that CDDER has extensive experience providing research, evaluation, and training to improve supports and services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- She said CDDER currently works with DDS and DMH as well as people and families with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- She explained that CDDER has helped create tools for people with disabilities that allow them to better express what they need in healthcare or to understand things about their health that may be challenging.

For additional details, copies of Director Lauer's presentation are available on the Commission's [Meeting Materials webpage](#).

During her presentation, Director Lauer highlighted areas where CDDER could provide support to the Commission:

1. Assistance running the Commission (scheduling meetings, taking meeting minutes, providing updates to members, helping write the Commission's report);
2. Creating a list of places where people might be buried and information about the cemeteries;
3. Researching archives and records about people with disabilities who were residents at state institutions; and
4. Identifying barriers to accessing archives and records about past residents at these institutions.

Director Lauer explained that CDDER and the Commission may face challenges to accessing records.

- She explained that the assistance of a lawyer may be needed to obtain certain papers which are protected under law or no longer considered a public document. She noted that this process can

be lengthy and certain papers and records may not be available in time for the Commission's report.

- Similarly, she also explained that finding records and papers may take a very long time and certain records may not be available in time for the Commission's report.
- Director Lauer explained that getting information about how people were buried when they died may go beyond the scope of their work. She stated that finding this information may take a very long time, but CDDER could help describe the steps for attempting to get this information.
- Director Lauer explained that CDDER can start to identify whether anyone has been buried in a place they are not supposed to be, but CDDER will most likely not have time to fully complete this task.

At the conclusion of Dr. Lauer's presentation, Commission members expressed appreciation for her clear and concise presentation, noting how helpful it was to hear what CDDER can and cannot do within the Commission's timeframe.

Mr. Green asked whether CDDER could help prepare a summary of how much it would cost to complete all of the work that the Commission is tasked with, such as obtaining records and researching unmarked gravesites. He said this summary could then be shared with lawmakers to secure additional funding so the work of the Commission could continue in the future. Dr. Lauer explained that CDDER would prepare a plan with details about staff support, how much future work would cost, and what steps others could take to continue the Commission's work after their report is submitted in July 2025.

Finally, Director Lauer explained that as part of CDDER's information gathering process, CDDER wants to speak with members of the Commission who already have lots of information and work with the State Archives and Massachusetts Historical Society.

Vote 2 for the Commission to hire CDDER to provide administrative and research support for the Commission's work: Mr. Green introduced a motion for the Commission to contract with CDDER to support its work and authorize DDS to sign any contracts necessary to finalize the agreement. Mr. Levrault seconded the motion, which was then approved by roll-call vote (see detailed record of votes above).

Victor Hernandez from DDS stated he will manage the contract and ensure its proper execution with CDDER. Mr. Clark requested that the details of the contract be in writing and available to the Commission for monitoring.

Mr. Millett reminded Commission members that the meetings are being recorded. He asked whether any Commission members would be willing to create a YouTube channel for the Commission's recordings. Ms. Benson agreed to create a YouTube channel for the purpose of uploading recordings of Commission meetings.

Mr. Millett explained that at the Commission's meeting in September, members voted to meet every two weeks. He proposed that meeting this frequently has been challenging and asked whether members would be interested in meeting less frequently. In response to a request from Ms. Mahon McCauley, Mr. Millett confirmed that meetings would not be scheduled on short notice and Commission members would be provided advance notice of any meetings.

Ms. Mateo encouraged members to respond to any emails sent by Commission support staff asking for their preferences for when the Commission should meet.

Mr. Levrault suggested that in between formal Commission meetings, a group of members could meet periodically with CDDER to check-in on their progress.

Vote 3 for the Commission to meet at the discretion of the Co-chairs: Mr. Levrault introduced the motion, which was seconded by Ms. Kelly and approved by roll-call vote (see detailed record of votes above).

Ms. Mahon McCauley requested that members identify themselves when speaking during Commission meetings to ensure visually impaired participants know who is speaking.

Vote 4 to adjourn: Ms. Mahon McCauley made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Mr. Levrault and approved by roll-call vote (see detailed record of votes above).

The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 pm.

Meeting Materials

1. Scope of work
2. CDDER presentation