



State of New Jersey

GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

P. O. Box 345

TRENTON, NEW JERSEY 08625-0345

MIKIE SHERRILL
Governor

DR. DALE G. CALDWELL
Lt. Governor

NEIL VAN ESS
Acting Chairman

CELINA LEVY
Executive Director

MINUTES

Governor's Council on Substance Use Disorder

March 17, 2026

Attendance: Neil Van Ess (Chairman), Celina Levy (Executive Director), John Armato (Public Member), Eileen Fishman (Public Member), Gisele Pemberton (Public Member), Cornell Williamson (AOC), Michelle Graham-Lyons (DCA), Herb Kaldany (DOC), Jessica Atkinson (DOH), David Kensler (DHS), Briana Menjivar (DOL), Kathleen Kurek (LPS), Allison Samay (President's Council)

Call to Order

The four hundredth and second regular meeting of the Governor's Council on Substance Use Disorder was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Chairman Neil Van Ess.

Open Public Meetings Act Statement

Mr. Van Ess announced that notice of this meeting was provided in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act (N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 – 10:4-21). In addition, Mr. Van Ess stated that public comments were to be provided electronically, through the GCSUD website contact portal between the hours of 10am and 1pm on the day of the meeting and must state "Public Comment" in the subject line.

Roll Call

Katelyn Assenheimer called the roll. Members present and absent were noted for the record. Mr. Van Ess informed the Council that this meeting would be for informational purposes only due to the lack of quorum.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Van Ess welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked Gregg Benson for stepping in for him last month.

He shared that the process of moving forward with the new grant cycle for the Alliance is underway. Celina and Sara will provide additional details in the Executive Director report.

Problem Gambling Awareness Resolution

Executive Director Celina Levy read a resolution recognizing March as Problem Gambling Awareness Month in New Jersey. This resolution will be voted on at next month's meeting.

Presentation: "The Interplay of Gambling and Substance Use: Risk Factors, Prevention and Recovery Strategies"

Luis Del Orbe, Executive Director of the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey (CCGNJ) gave an overview of the organization and the effects of gambling.

CCGNJ is a private non-profit organization that provides information, education and referral services to those affected by problem gambling. The Council also offers 24/7 support via the NJ Helpline at 1-800-GAMBLER. Brochures, educational links and fact sheets can also be found at their website: www.800GAMBLER.org.

There are three types of gamblers: social gamblers, problem gamblers and disordered gamblers. Possible causes of problem and disordered gambling are trauma, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), early experimentation, peer pressure, family history of gambling or co-occurring mental conditions.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Celina Levy shared with the Council the primary focus of the GCSUD office is the beginning of the new grant cycle. The Alliance unit is preparing for and providing guidance and technical support to the Alliances. Ms. Levy also acknowledged the guidelines workgroup that met last summer. She also reminded the Council that there will be a vote to approve County plans at both the May and June meetings, so quorum is essential.

Sara Thode, Director of Prevention and Planning shared that GCSUD staff are currently reviewing 13 county plans that have been submitted. She also reminded the Council that Financial Disclosure Statements will be sent out by the Ethics Commission on April 1st and are due on May 15th, with a fifty-dollar fee per day imposed if they are received late.

Ms. Levy thanked the Council members for their guidance and support, County Coordinators and Alliances for their good work in light of challenges faced, GCSUD staff for their strong work ethic and to Chairman Van Ess for his leadership.

Adjournment

Mr. Van Ess adjourned the meeting at 11:36.