



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

January 20, 2026

Attendance: Neil Van Ess (Chairman), Celina Levy (Executive Director), Gregg Benson (Public Member), Donna DeStefano (Public Member), Eileen Fishman (Public Member), Sweta Kansagra (Public Member), Gisele Pemberton (Public Member), Cornell Williamson (AOC), Jeff Carrick (DCF), Michelle Graham-Lyons (DCA), Herb Kaldany (DOC), Lu Pereira (DOE), Harry Reyes (DHS), Briana Menjivar (DOL), Katie Kurek (LPS), Noelle Lee-Turner (DVA), Allison Samay (President's Council)

Call to Order

The four hundredth regular meeting of the Governor's Council on Substance Use Disorder was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Executive Director Celina Levy.

Open Public Meetings Act Statement

Ms. Levy 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, Ms. Levy 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.

Election of Officers

Executive Director Celina Levy asked for nominations for the Vice Chair of the Governor's Council. Gregg Benson nominated Neil Van Ess and this was seconded by Donna DeStefano. After a vote, Mr. Van Ess was elected Vice Chairman. (Y-14; N-0; ABS-0).

Mr. Van Ess asked for nomination for second Vice Chair. Gregg Benson was nominated by Donna DeStefano and this vote was seconded by Sweta Kansagra. After a vote, Mr. Benson was elected second Vice Chair. (Y-15; N-0; ABS-0).

Chairman's Report

Chairman Van Ess shared how wonderful it was to start 2026 after accomplishing so much in 2025, with gratitude to Council members, County Coordinators, Alliance members, GCSUD staff and all collaborative partners across the state for their input and support, looking forward to continuing that good work with the new administration.

Approval of Minutes

After a brief discussion, the minutes for October, November and December of 2025 were approved.

October (Y-13; N-0; ABS-3)

November (Y-14; N-0; ABS-2)

December (Y-11; N-0; ABS-5)

2025 Veterans Day Resolution

After a brief discussion the 2025 Veterans Day resolution was approved. (Y-16; N-0; ABS-0)

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Celina Levy thanked the Council for attaining quorum and said she was pleased to have Chairman Van Ess continue his leadership role for the Council. She also thanked Mr. Benson for being there when Mr. Van Ess is not available.

Ms. Levy echoed the remarks made by Chairman Van Ess in his report, acknowledging all that was accomplished in 2025 that was made possible through inspiring collaborative efforts, and that the GCSUD looks forward to continuing these efforts with the new administration.

Director of Prevention and Planning, Sara Thode shared with the Council that the needs assessment process and the County and Municipal Alliance Plans for FY27 are currently being completed and are due to GCSUD staff at the end of February. All forms and documents for this current grant cycle will be completed in MAGS.

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

Chairman Van Ess adjourned the meeting at 10:55.