



State of New Jersey

GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

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NEIL VAN ESS
Acting Chairman

CELINA LEVY
Executive Director

MINUTES

Governor's Council on Substance Use Disorder

April 21, 2026

Attendance: Neil Van Ess (Chairman), Celina Levy (Executive Director), Gregg Benson (Public Member), Sweta Neygandhi (Public Member), Jeff Carrick (DCF), Michelle Graham-Lyons (DCA), Herb Kaldany (DOC), Lu Pereira (DOE), Jessica Atkinson (DOH), Harry Reyes (DHS), Katie Kurek (LPS), Noelle Lee-Turner (DVA)

Call to Order

The four hundredth and third 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 thanked everyone for joining the meeting and welcomed Dr. Mercy Adeniranye of DHS who is replacing Don Hallcom and will be one of the presenters at today's meeting.

Chairman Van Ess also shared that Gloucester County has withdrawn from the Alliance program. Deputy Director, Rebecca Alfaro will provide additional details in her report.

The Alliance Unit continues to work with the counties on finalizing their plans and Chairman Van Ess reminded the Council members that they would be voting on the county resolutions at the May and June meetings, so quorum is essential.

Alcohol Awareness Month Resolution

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

Presentation: "Opioid Recovery and Remediation Funds"

David Kensler, Chief of Staff and Dr. Mercy Adeniranye, Program Manager of the Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Department of Human Services gave an overview of the Opioid Recovery and Remediation Funds to the Council members.

New Jersey was allocated over one billion dollars in the Opioid Settlement Funds. These funds have been used for programs in treatment, prevention and harm reduction with an emphasis on the distribution of naloxone as well as the expansion of community peer recovery centers.

A strategic plan for 2025-2030 has been developed to focus on housing, harm reduction, treatment as well as coordinated wrap-around services.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Celina Levy shared with the Council the primary focus of the GCSUD office is the new grant cycle. Council members will be voting on the County Plan resolutions, and she reminded the members that it is imperative that there is quorum at the May 19th and June 16th meetings.

Deputy Director, Rebecca Alfaro shared that Gloucester County had dropped out of the Alliance Program for the FY27 grant term. These funds will be allocated and used for future trainings and enhancements to the Municipal Alliance Grant system. Gloucester County will have the option to rejoin the program in the next grant year.

Sara Thode, Director of Prevention and Planning shared that GCSUD staff are currently reviewing county plans that have been submitted. The County Plan Review team will meet on April 27th. She also reminded the Council that Financial Disclosure Statements 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 11:06.