



State of New Jersey

GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

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Lt. Governor

NEIL VAN ESS
Acting Chairman

CELINA LEVY
Executive Director

MINUTES

Governor's Council on Substance Use Disorder

November 18, 2025

Attendance: Neil Van Ess (Chairman), Celina Levy (Executive Director), John Armato (Public Member), Gregg Benson (Public Member), Sweta Kansagra (Public Member), Gisele Pemberton (Public Member), Jeff Carrick (DCF), Michelle Graham-Lyons (DCA), Adam Cortes (DOC), Lu Pereira (DOE), Lashunda Omida (DOH), Katie Kurek (LPS), Noelle Lee-Turner (DMAVA), Allison Samay (NJ President's Council)

The three hundred and ninety eighth regular meeting of the Governor's Council on Substance Use Disorder was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Acting 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. He thanked the members for attaining quorum at last month's meeting to adopt the 2025 Master Plan. He thanked the Governor's office, Council members, GCSUD Master Plan subcommittee, County Coordinators and Alliances, GCSUD Alliance unit for their invaluable input, and Celina and Rebecca for their efforts in overseeing the process.

Veterans Day Resolution

Executive Director Celina Levy read a resolution recognizing November 11th as Veterans Day. This resolution will be voted on at the next meeting.

Presentation: “DMAVA Update”

Esther Chucaralao, Director of Veterans Services of the NJ Department of Military and Veterans Affairs gave an overview of the Department and the programs that are provided to the Council.

As of January 9th, DMAVA will be restructured into two separate departments, Department of Military Affairs and Department of Veterans Affairs. The Department of Veterans Affairs will focus on veteran-related matters and military functions will continue at the current department.

“Bringing Veterans Home” is a program in collaboration with the Department of Community Affairs that aims to end homelessness among veterans. Since October, 1,280 veterans have been housed.

Veterans Services Offices have been expanded to all 21 counties in New Jersey. This will allow easier access to NJ veterans without having to travel.

“The Governor’s Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and their Families” is an interagency team of military and civilian leaders tasked with developing a plan to prevent suicide among veterans. Through this initiative, DMAVA has trained over 560 people in Mental Health First Aid with plans for more trainings in the future.

Executive Director’s Report

Executive Director Celina Levy expressed her gratitude to the Council for adopting the 2025 Master Plan. NJOIT is working on final formatting and once that is complete, the link will be shared with Council.

Sara Thode, Director of Prevention and Planning shared with the Council that the Volunteer of the Year Ceremony will be held on Tuesday, December 9th.

Ms. Levy thanked the Council members for their guidance and support, the County Alliance Coordinators for their good work, GCSUD staff for moving the office forward and to Neil Van Ess for his ongoing leadership and support.

Adjournment

Mr. Benson adjourned the meeting at 10:55.