

State of Connecticut
State Board of Mental Health and Addiction Services
March 17, 2021
Microsoft Teams Meeting

Present online: Chmn. John Hamilton, Craig Allen, Janice Andersen, Daniella Arias, Sharon Castelli, Deanna Delaney, Steve DiLella, Marcia DuFore, Michaela Fissel, Kathy Flaherty, Allison Fulton, Michael Giralmo, Joe Linbeck, Pamela Mautte, Manuel Paris, Larry Pittinger, Brian Reigner, Hilary Rudenauer, Kevin Sevarino, Phil Valentine

DMHAS Staff: Commr. Delphin-Rittmon, Deputy Commr. Nancy Navarretta, Yvonne Addo, Steve DiPietro, Marilyn Duran, Ana Florence, Marlene Jacques, Mary Kate Mason, Art Mongillo

Agenda Item 1: Call to order and introductions

The meeting was called to order at approximately 2:30 PM by John Hamilton.

Agenda Item 2: Minutes of previous meeting review and action

The minutes from the February 17, 2021 meeting were reviewed and accepted.

Agenda Item 3: Commissioner's Update

- **COVID-19** – Commr. Delphin-Rittmon stated that the COVID numbers have been going down and the vaccination rate is climbing. At the current time there are no COVID positive folks that are served in DMHAS inpatient facilities. DMHAS has been working with conservators to answer vaccination questions for people that we serve. Well over 50% of the people that we serve have given consent to be vaccinated. We are currently working on the 2nd dose of vaccinations. We are also working on getting staff vaccinated and have about 56% done. We are continuing to have staff telework and are discussing bringing more staff and services back as people get vaccinated.
- **Legislative Session** – Mary Kate Mason announced that the DMHAS bill on electronic health records and increasing the presence of people with lived experience on the WFH Advisory Board as well as allowing clients to be present during search of their property has passed unanimously out of committee. We provided feedback on another bill we have been monitoring that has to do with taking people into custody after an opioid overdose. We are working with Advocacy Unlimited on the peer support bills. The letter from the State Board on the legalization of marijuana has been received by the Governor's office. Commr. Delphin-Rittmon thanked Mary Kate for all her work during the session. Mary Kate also wants to thank the advocacy community for all their work.
- **Budget** – Commr. Delphin-Rittmon stated that the budget is largely unchanged from last year. Steve DiPietro said we got some caseload growth and some discharge money. Some reductions DMHAS got basically were for moving HR PS dollars to OPM and DAS.

Commr. Delphin-Rittmon also stated that DMHAS received money from the American Rescue Act, which is a two-year funding agreement. For the Substance Abuse Block Grant, it will be approximately \$17 million over 2 years and about 20% of that is for prevention set aside. The other 80% is for treatment and training related programs and initiatives. For the Mental Health Block Grant, it will be around \$8 million dollars and 30% set aside for DCF and 70% to DMHAS. The dates for these awards are 3/15/21 to 3/14/23. We have to put a plan together for how we intend to use the resources by April 6th. With the Coach Initiative Grant, we have been able to hire 37 crisis counselors working across the state. We also have been collaborating with faith-based initiatives and have 12 counselors working with them. We also have crisis counselors working with people in assisted living facilities and in shelters. There is also an online campaign related to this work. Some of the resources were used to pay for telehealth equipment for DOC. We have also scaled up hours for the mobile crisis teams, which have been very active during this pandemic connecting homeless people with shelters.

- **Other** – Commr. Delphin-Rittmon announced Hal Smith submitted his resignation and that DMHAS will soon start a national search of a new director for WFH.

Agenda Item 4: Presentation Topic: Advocacy Unlimited – Offering Holistic, Peer-Led Recovery Supports

Michaela Fissel and Hilary Rudenauer did the presentation for AU. They provided an overview of the services provided at AU. AU remains committed to individual growth, human rights and systems transformation. They believe that everyone has the inner capacity to heal, grow and change. AU envisions a world in which everyone – regardless of socioeconomic status or psychiatric/addiction histories – has space to be seen, heard, and valued. The approach used by AU is peer-led, holistic, non-clinical, trauma-informed, recovery-oriented and multiple pathways to recovery and healing. AU has many unique and distinct programs: TOIVO is a holistic approach to stress management; Healing from Within is a program where Toivo staff provide holistic healing and stress-management groups on inpatient psychiatric units in CT. Toivo also provides stress management trainings and retreats for everyone. For more programs and information that AU has to offer go to <https://advocacyunlimited.org>. The virtual Karuna Conference will be held on April 26-30th for more information go to www.karunact.org. Commr. Delphin-Rittmon announced she so appreciates all the work and collaboration AU is continuing to do.

Agenda Item 5: Warming Centers update: DOH Response during the Pandemic

Steve DiLella, Director of Individual and Family Support Programs, CT DOH, provided information on what DOH has been doing during the pandemic and where DOH stands now. DOH took immediate action when the pandemic struck to avoid the quick spread of COVID, since homeless people have a greater risk for bad outcomes because of comorbid conditions. Non-congregate sheltering and hotels were provided to deconcentrate the shelters and provide proper social distancing space and be safely sheltered. DOH currently is continuing this practice. DOH has been working with the shelters to ensure they have the necessary materials and staff to ensure safe shelter capacity. Some federal dollars were provided to help out. DOH has been able to reduce the number of people staying at hotels since the COVID number have been going down. DOH is working with coordinated access networks to try and identify how many folks can be put into housing with additional housing resources received by the federal government, specifically, permanent housing vouchers and rapid rehousing. DOH hopes to return to the normal operation of the homeless service system as the numbers continue to go down and vaccinations numbers increase.

Agenda Item 6: Future Topics Request & Discussion

Hidden in Plain Sight – A virtual presentation

Agenda Item 7: Workgroup updates / General updates / Announcements

- Dr. Sevarino of the Marijuana workgroup mentioned that the group has not met since they submitted the written and oral testimony. Dr. Allen and Dr. Sevarino met with Rep. Parker regarding the youth aspect of the legalization of marijuana. Chmn. John Hamilton mention the Social Service workgroup has not met since the last meeting.
- Marcia DuFore mentioned it is Gambling Awareness month and if you go onto the CT Council for problem gambling website you will find a list of webinars related to problem gambling.

Agenda Item 9: Potential Future Topics (need for Presenters):

- Impacts of Recreational Marijuana legislation – Dr. Kevin Sevarino
- Update on Sober Housing
- HealthCare: Access to Specialty Services
- Alcohol Awareness

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 P.M. The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 21st beginning at 2:30 PM.