

LUZERNE-WYOMING COUNTIES MENTAL HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES (MHDS)  
ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE

**Advisory Board Meeting**  
**Thursday, September 22, 2022**  
*Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting*

*Participants:* Linda Armstrong – Vice Chair, Scott Crispell, Raelene Daring, Dr. Chelsea Graziano, Melisa Littleton, Craig Mark, Tom O'Neill, Councilman Steve Urban, Dave Wilson Staff: Tara Fox – Administrator, Amy Tomkoski, Phil Buickus, Joan Kaminski, Commissioner Ernie King, John Alunni.

**Welcome** – Linda Armstrong, Vice Chair of the MHDS Advisory Board, opened the meeting at 4:04 p.m. by welcoming everyone. She thanked the County MHDS Office for providing lunch at the Re-Entry, Recovery, Wellness Expo at Wilkes University where she is currently participating until 7 p.m. Ms. Armstrong mentioned this event shows the community pulling together for the needs of many.

**Approval of May 26, 2022 Advisory Board Meeting Minutes** – Ms. Armstrong presented a motion to accept the minutes of the May 26, 2022 Advisory Board meeting. This was moved by Mr. Wilson and seconded by Ms. Littleton. All were in favor to accept the minutes as written.

**Advisory Board Members' Term Expirations and Vacancies** – Raelene Daring, Chair of the Nominating Committee, introduced and welcomed newly appointed (and also former) Advisory Board member, Scott Crispell to his first Board meeting after being appointed by Luzerne County Council at their February 22, 2022 Council Meeting, for a term ending December 31, 2024. Mr. Crispell represents Local Citizens' Organizations Active in the Field of Developmental Services. Board members welcomed Mr. Crispell. He noted that he is happy to be back.

Ms. Daring reported that the following MHDS Advisory Board members' terms are expiring December 31, 2022: Dr. Chelsea Graziano (Luzerne County), Melisa Littleton (Luzerne County), Councilman Urban (Luzerne County), Raelene Daring (Luzerne County).

If there is interest in being reconsidered for a seat on this Board, Joan Kaminski can forward the "Authorities, Boards and Commission (ABC) Application for Appointment" to these Board members in order to complete the application. Ms. Littleton indicated that she submitted her application and is hoping she can continue to contribute to this MHDS Advisory Board.

Ms. Daring reported that the current vacancies include:

- One physician
- Local citizens' organizations active in the field of mental health/consumer or family representative

**Nominations for Officers of the MHDS Advisory Board** (2-year term beginning January 1, 2023 and ending December 31, 2024)

- **Motion to Open Nominations for Officers of the MHDS Advisory Board:** Ms. Armstrong  
All were in favor with no oppositions

- **Motion to Open Nominations for Chair of the MHDS Advisory Board**

**Motion to Open Nominations:** Ms. Armstrong

All were in favor with no oppositions or abstentions

**Nominations Open**

**Mr. O'Neill nominated:** Commissioner Tom Henry

**Second:** Ms. Daring

All were in favor with no oppositions or abstentions

Mr. Wilson nominated: Ms. Armstrong

Ms. Armstrong declined.

No other nominations

Nominations closed

**Commissioner Henry is nominated to serve another term as Chair of the MHDS Advisory Board.** Ms.

Armstrong asked that an email be forwarded to Commissioner Henry to determine if he accepts the nomination.

- **Motion to Open Nominations for Vice-Chair of the MHDS Advisory Board**

**Motion to Open Nominations:** Ms. Armstrong

All were in favor with no oppositions or abstentions

**Nominations Open**

**Mr. Wilson nominated:** Linda Armstrong

Ms. Armstrong accepted

All were in favor with no oppositions or abstentions

No other nominations

Nominations closed

**Linda Armstrong is nominated to serve another term as Vice-Chair of the MHDS Advisory Board**

- **Motion to Open Nominations for Secretary of the MHDS Advisory Board**

**Motion to Open Nominations:** Mr. Mark

All were in favor with no oppositions or abstentions

**Nominations Open**

**Ms. Armstrong nominated:** Craig Mark

**Second:** Mr. O'Neill

Mr. Mark accepted

All were in favor with no oppositions or abstentions

No other nominations

Nominations closed

**Craig Mark is nominated to serve another term as Secretary of the MHDS Advisory Board**

Ms. Armstrong indicated one more round of nominations will be conducted in December. If there are no further nominations, the election of the above-nominated officers will occur.

### **Administrator's Report**

- *Financial Services Update* – Ms. Fox, MHDS Administrator, provided the Financial Services update. Please see attached Revenue and Expenditure Report through August 31, 2022 for fiscal year 2021-2022. The following was also reported:
  - Ms. Fox announced the Request for Proposal (RFP) process has been finalized and contracts for 2023 have been determined. Since funding has been flat, there is not much change in contracting of services.
  - Ms. Fox clarified that State increases in Mental Health funding were distributed to schools and State hospitals rather than County Base dollars. She emphasized money to the County is very much important since County Base dollars are spent as MHDS sees fit rather than within a special category. MHDS continues to request advocacy for increases to County Base funding for both Mental Health and Developmental Services.
  - Mr. Alunni commended Ms. Fox for assisting with a narrative regarding a request to legislators to advocate for an increase in Mental Health funding. Wyoming County did receive a positive response from local legislators but

unfortunately did not receive the hopeful outcome. The request for narratives were encouraged by Pennsylvania Association of County Administrators (PACA). Unfortunately, it was turned down by a large margin. Commissioner King noted most budget decisions occur at the committee level prior to presenting for the final vote. Ms. Fox mentioned the Governor's original proposed Budget would have increased County Mental Health dollars by a great deal.

- *Developmental Services Update* – Ms. Tomkoski, MHDS Deputy Administrator, provided the Developmental Services update. Please see attached report. The following was also discussed:
  - Ms. Tomkoski asked Advisory Board members to contact Joan Kaminski if they are interested in receiving a copy of the Quality Management (QM) Plan.
  - Mr. Wilson asked if individuals are transitioning to the community or Selinsgrove State Center due to the White Haven Center closure. Ms. Tomkoski indicated it is specific to the individual. It continues to be difficult to place individuals in the community due to the shortage of group home staff. Mr. Buickus reported that four individuals are in the process of moving to Selinsgrove State Center. There is another individual looking at community home placement with a provider.
- *Supports Coordination Organization (SCO) Update* – Mr. Buickus, SCO Manager, provided the SCO update. Please see attached report. The following was also discussed:
  - Ms. Fox noted in-person visits by Supports Coordinators (SC's) are preferred.
  - Mr. O'Neill asked about current vacancies in the SCO. Ms. Fox reported there are currently five vacancies with a freeze on hiring due to the decreased level of productivity. Ms. Fox explained various reasons for this decrease and measures taken to boost productivity. Mr. O'Neill noted that over the years, there has been a struggle with productivity. He emphasized the importance of SC's producing so billing can occur. He mentioned if productivity is not being met with a clear quota and proper coaching, termination would occur with other employers. He also questioned if this is being reflected in performance evaluations. Ms. Fox stated it has been reflected and disciplinary action has occurred as well as encouragement through retention bonuses. Mr. O'Neill knows productivity has been a priority of the County MHDS office for years. He also noted productivity is critical since poor performance affects everyone. Ms. Fox indicated this continues to be addressed on the forefront.
- *Mental Health Services Update*
  - Ms. Fox reported staff have been asked to participate as panelist at the "Homes Within Reach" statewide conference. Ms. Fox and Volunteers of America (VOA) Staff will present at the conference in December.
  - Ms. Fox announced due to the huge success of the Handle With Care (HWC) program, staff have been requested to present at the 2022 PACA Fall Conference in November.
  - Ms. Fox reported the "For Kids By Kids" Food Program was developed by youth in the Wellness/Diversionsary Program and Youth Drop In Center for community service. The youth distribute food at Kistler Elementary School in Wilkes-Barre once a week with recipe cards in English and Spanish to create family togetherness. They have distributed over 1,400 meals over the Summer. Now that school is back in session, they are looking for suggestions regarding ways they can help in order to keep the group intact and continue their work. Ms. Fox asked Advisory Board members email her any ideas or suggestions, in addition to any volunteer help that is needed throughout the year and during the holidays. The following was suggested:
    - Ms. Littleton mentioned she will ask the advisers of college student clubs on the Penn State Wilkes-Barre campus if they are looking for volunteer opportunities. Ms. Fox was hopeful that volunteering with college students may inspire the youth.

- Commissioner King offered to speak with Seven Loaves Soup Kitchen in Tunkhannock to determine whether or not a partnership can be established or if the youth can assist with food distribution in Wyoming County.
- Mr. Mark mentioned his church has been involved in supporting the food pantry for Luzerne County Community College. Food pantries will be open in all of the colleges to assist single parent students who are struggling to make living, put food on the table and attend school. Mr. Mark will contact Ms. Fox with further details.
- The 2022 Luzerne County Cares Community Expo was held in-person at the end of August. Over 500 people were in attendance throughout the day. Overall, the satisfaction reports were positive and it was a success. Dr. Graziano mentioned it was a great event. Dr. Graziano and her clinical director were presenters at the event.
- September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. The County MHDS Office partnered with restaurants in Luzerne and Wyoming Counties to display posters. Yard signs and banners were displayed on the Luzerne County Courthouse lawn and the MHDS Office. The Out of the Darkness Walk was also conducted earlier in the month.
- Ms. Fox reported the current census at Clarks Summit State Hospital (CSSH) is 148. Luzerne County has 57 residents and Wyoming County has 1 resident at the hospital. There is 1 transfer pending to the State hospital. Mr. Wilson asked if the bed cap was reduced and if there are augmentations in referrals. Ms Fox clarified the bed cap was reduced by 2 beds with the new CHIPP's (Community/Hospital Integration Projects Program) initiative. There have been no augmentations in referrals to CSSH.
- Ms. Fox provided an overview regarding the closure of Community Counseling Services and First Hospital. She noted the closure of First Hospital will not have an immediate impact since the majority of residents from Luzerne-Wyoming Counties were being transferred out of the area. Approximately 1,000 individuals have been transferred out of the area in one year. There is a need for a local facility who is willing to accept difficult to serve individuals and had ties to local providers.

Mr. Wilson asked when Geisinger's new 96-bed inpatient facility will be opening. Ms. Fox indicated the facility is planning to open in approximately one year. It will include a consolidation of other inpatient psychiatric beds. Acadia, a parent company, will be operating the new facility. Acadia has been accepting a large number of Luzerne-Wyoming Counties' referrals to their inpatient unit in Philadelphia. Acadia will be a great asset to our community.

Ms. Fox provided an overview of where consumers will be transitioning with the closure of Community Counseling Services:

- Intensive Behavioral Health Rehabilitation Services (IBHRS) for children - 115 consumers will transition mainly to Northeast Counseling Services and others to smaller private providers.
- Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services – Transitioning to the Robinson Counseling Center and Northeast Counseling Services.
- Partial Hospitalization Services - Some consumers will transition to Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services at the Robinson Counseling Center. Those who require Partial Hospitalization level of care will transition to Northeast Counseling Services.
- Outpatient Services – Transition plans continue for the 33,600 individuals receiving this service. The majority of individuals will transition to Robinson Counseling Center and Northeast Counseling Services with some transitioning to small private providers.
- Personal Care Home – Transitioned to Northeast Counseling Services. All six residents will remain as well as staff.

- o Day Development Program – The SCO and Administrative Entity are assisting in transitioning 36 consumers/families to a new program.

Crisis Services will also be ending at Wilkes-Barre General Hospital. The goal is to transition all Crisis Services from the Emergency Rooms (ER) to Community Based Mobile Outreach with existing providers. Through Northeast Behavioral Health Care Consortium (NBHCC) reinvestment dollars, a Crisis Receiving and Stabilization Unit will be developed in the community with State approval. An application was submitted for County American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for a second Stabilization Center. Mr. O’Neill questioned what will occur if an individual self presents at the ER. Ms. Fox clarified services will continue to be provided but at the hospital’s expense if individuals self present at the ER. Ms. Fox also mentioned discussion was held regarding the availability of a Peer Specialist at the ER to function as an intercept. Commissioner King noted there is an empty hospital in Wyoming County and partners are being sought. Ms. Armstrong noted combining Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol is crucial. The role of the Peer and Certified Recovery Specialist is vital. She mentioned long lengths of stay in ER continue as patients await inpatient psychiatric beds. This is not only a local challenge but also on a Regional and State level.

Ms. Fox stated a huge community awareness campaign will be provided regarding the above. Case specific meetings are held to assure a smooth transition as well as weekly meetings with the Commonwealth team, County, State and managed care. Due to non-disclosure agreements, the County Office is not provided information regarding what will occur with First Hospital or Community Counseling Services.

Ms. Armstrong commended Ms. Fox for managing this transition with grace and professionalism. Ms. Armstrong was relieved to hear that the closing of First Hospital will not be a crisis to the community.

- Mr. Wilson asked if Act 76 of 2022 can continue if certain requirements are met. He indicated the State is promoting Telehealth for those who are willing. Ms. Fox stated face-to-face is preferred but Telehealth is acceptable. She emphasized Telehealth cannot be forced upon patients. Telehealth is provided but not at the ease and convenience of the provider. Consumers must be willing to accept Telehealth as the preferred method.

**Public Comment** – No public were present.

**Adjournment** – *With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:08 p.m. It will be decided whether the next meeting will be held in person, virtually or both.*

Submitted by:   
Craig Mark, Secretary  
Luzerne-Wyoming Counties Mental Health and Developmental Services Advisory Board