

**HAWAI‘I STATE COUNCIL ON MENTAL HEALTH (SCMH)
DRAFT MEETING MINUTES
April 14, 2026, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon
Via Zoom with in-person location at
Hale F Conference Room, 2201 Waimano Home Road, Pearl City, 96782**

Members Present: Katherine Aumer, Kathleen Merriam, Forrest Wells, Mary Pat Waterhouse, Danielle Bergan, Lea Dias, Jon Fujii, Heidi Ilyavi, Jackie Jackson, Kristin Will

Members Excused: Tiana Celis-Webster, Christine Montague-Hicks, John Betlach

Members Absent: Asianna Zaragosa-Torres

Staff Present: Carolyn Weygan-Hildebrand (AMHD)

Guests Present: Marissa “Squirrel” Celeste, Jack Barile, Eva McKinsey, Jim Gottstein

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Katherine Aumer called the meeting to order at 9:06 a.m. Quorum was established at 9:12 a.m.

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

- In case of audiovisual communication breakdown that could not be solved within 30 minutes, the Council meeting will recess and resume on April 21 at 9 a.m. using the same connection details.
- Membership
 - Resignation and vacancy. Ray Rice resigned from the Department of Human Services, and so his Council seat is also currently vacant. Council expressed best wishes and appreciation for his service, where he was active in legislation committee work then staff development.
 - Nominations. Ten Council and Service Area Boards nominees passed Senate Health and Human Services Committee hearing for advise and consent. The following are projected to become service area board members: Maui – Anuhea Getgen, Nicole Hokohana; Oahu -Raven Sevilleja; Kauai – Priti Tayal, Kanwardeep Kaleka. The following were confirmed for the State Council – Marissa Celeste, Danielle Bergan, Mary Pat Waterhouse, Jackie Jackson, and Kathleen Merriam.

- Events.
 - Several members attended the April 13, 2026 National Alliance on Mental Health Annual State Conference. Attendees were encouraged to share highlights.
 - May is Mental Health Awareness Month and the Mental Health of America Hawai'i will have its Annual Awards Celebration on May 20, 2026. There will be other events across the islands.
 - Kona Low Storm disaster. Members were encouraged to report and share behavioral health impacts and recovery needs.

III. COMMUNITY INPUT

- Oral Testimony. Dr. Jack Barile, University of Hawaii at Manoa Social Science Research Institute, provided an update on the Quality-of-Life Survey (first run in 2024; ~8,000 respondents; dashboard in use for policy/testimony/grants). The 2026 survey is open until end of May; requested broad outreach via listservs and community groups. Council members offered introduction to MHA Hawai'i; members suggested NAMI/MHA channels (~3,000 reach). Website <https://www.health-study.com/2026-survey>
- Written Testimony, Connie Mitchell, Executive Director of Institute for Human Services, asked whether Med-QUEST will authorize Community Integration Services Plus (CIS+) to cover medical respite for behavioral health stabilization (e.g., post MH1/MH4-6, initiation of Long Acting Injections antipsychotics). Council member, Jon Fujii, described medical respite eligibility (homeless + clinical criteria), clarified respite is time limited and not treatment, and will follow up with Connie Mitchell directly via medical respite hui. The Council requested a future briefing clarifying respite versus rehabilitation.
- Written and Oral Testimony. Dr. Jim Gottstein, who is on the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) advisory council urged adoption of voluntary, evidenced-supported alternatives (e.g., peer respites, Soteria houses, Open Dialogue, Housing First, non-police crisis response), cautioning against expansion of coercive drug-centered practices. He also mentioned housing first solutions. A comment was made that Housing First solutions have been met with “Not in my backyard” issues. He inquired about his written testimony not found on the website. Staff assured that the written testimony was e-mailed to members during the meeting and the 20+ page document will be posted on the website as soon as the meeting is over. Refer to <https://scmh.hawaii.gov/meetings>. The Council thanked him for his testimony.

IV. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

March 10, 2026 minutes approved unanimously (Motion: Forrest Wells; Second: Lea Dias). Minor name correction previously noted by staff and corrections will be reflected in the approved minutes.

V. OLD BUSINESS

A. March Presentation

The Council approved a thank you letter to Joy Soares (Med-QUEST) on the March presentation on the State's Rural Health Transformation Program. The letter, with a minor edit was approved unanimously (Motion: Jon Fujii; Second: Heidi Ilyavi).

B. Legislative Advocacy Wrap-Up

Council decisions were implemented by way of completing and submitting testimonies, with only a few mistakes and late submission. Faster turnaround time from draft testimonies to final submission was possible through effort of staff, intern, and the negotiating permitted interaction group members. This year's progress can also be noted from specific amendments by the Council to bills relating to homelessness and certified community behavioral health clinics.

- SB2803 and SB1854. The Council-proposed amendments emphasize the mental health continuum of care in planning housing and addressing homelessness. The amendments were accepted by the House Committee on Human Services and Homelessness and incorporated into SB2803 SD1 HD1. The Council-proposed amendments to keep the Council membership at 21 have not been accepted yet for SB1854, a measure that will establish a State certifying office for community behavioral health clinics.
- SB2921 (transfer of non-general funds) The Council provided comment (not support) seeking keeping mental health/substance abuse special funds.
- Staff's internal bill tracker was shared with each member for reference.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Ramping up for Council's 2026 Planning Role

- SAMHSA issued the guidance for the Fiscal Year 2027 Mental Health Block Grant mini-application. The early announcement offers an opportunity for early engagement in the process of application. It is a mini-application year, and staff highlighted that SAMHSA is primarily seeking answers to the topics of Early Serious Mental Illness, Crisis Services only, and projected expenditures.
- Presentations on these topics are scheduled in the next two months as part of early engagement of the public and the Council.
- Staff noted the broader role of the Council in state and local area service planning and the soundness of sorting how best to engage with this year's MHBG mini-proposal first.

- The Council’s current Planning and Performance Committee will lead in MHBG planning engagement. The current members are K. Aumer and F. Wells. MHBG discussions will begin with presentations on EMSI and Crisis Services in May and June. The idea is to surface better ideas to offer, including from local areas, between May to July when planning more about EMSI, crisis services, and MHBG fund uses.
- There is concern over engagement and motivating participation at the local area level when local boards have very few members. For example, quorum in the Oahu Service Area Board is three.
 - There are many consumers and former consumers out there. There are many who are seeking ways to give back. Example, the information can be shared with VocRehab clients.
 - Motivation has two sides where on one side, joining a board is worthwhile, which is why it is also important to have plans that are relevant to the local areas.
 - Motivation also means reaching out, letting the public know how and when boards meet. The State Council website has a channel on service area boards (<https://scmh.hawaii.gov/service-area-boards>) and so it can be one tool to use.
 - Maui has a flyer, which can also be found on the website. Hawaii had flyers that was needing Board approval. Oahu can adapt Maui’s if its Board approves. AMHD might be able to tap its communication specialist to help make the flyers if they do not require much work (e.g., tweaking the Maui flyer for Oahu).
 - Some members indicated willingness to print or share materials to pass on to others.
 - The Council has committed to helping increase membership of SABs.
 - Kauai will have two incoming members, up from zero. Staff will be working more closely for onboarding.

B. Council Onboarding Tools – Website and Guide Updating

- A negotiating Permitted Interaction Group was created to update the SCMH Membership Guide (2021) by July 1, 2026. Volunteers: Mary Pat Waterhouse and Jackie Jackson.
- There is a national deadline of April 24, 2026 for meeting new ADA requirements for online materials. This affects the Council’s website. Staff assessed that there is much to work on to meet requirements. Staff are considering all ways to meet compliance by deadline time, including getting some of the contents offline or made accessible to members by way of password only. Given the earlier discussion, the Service Area Board pages will be prioritized for ADA compliance so it can remain publicly available.

VI. INFORMATIONAL REPORTS BY COUNCIL MEMBERS

A. Island Representative Reports

- Oahu SAB -Jackie Jackson: SAB had quorum on March 18; approved February minutes; there was an update from Dr. Christine Park (WCC Mental Health Tech Program); planning a future ADAD speaker; adapting Maui flyer for Oahu recruitment; next meeting: third Wednesday at 9:00 a.m. (Zoom).

B. Government Sector Representative Reports

- Med-QUEST (MQD/DHS)- Jon Fujii.
 - Kona Low disasters: Pending federal disaster determination limited waiver options; Kula Hospital roof/water damage led to relocation of ICF/IID residents to Maui/Oahu facilities for an estimated ~6 months while comprehensive repairs proceed; individuals are safe but may lack optimal specialized support during displacement.
 - CCBHC demonstration: DHS/MQD and DOH jointly applied on April 1 for a 4-year CCBHC demonstration beginning January 1, 2027; initial sites Lahaina and Kahului (former AMHD clinics) with no-wrong-door access and monthly PPS reimbursement (paired with quality metrics). Additional clinics may be added overtime.
 - HR 1 (federal) – Medicaid eligibility changes: Oct 1, 2026: changes to immigrant status categories; Jan 1, 2027: work/volunteer/school requirements and six-month renewals for the expansion population. MQD awaits CMS guidance (expected July 2026), is exploring software for documentation, and will coordinate broad communications (plans, QR codes, website). Council requested a future briefing on these.

*J. Fujii requested to be excused at 10:00 a.m.

- Behavioral Health -Kathleen Merriam.
 - The NAMI Statewide Conference focused on reimagining crisis care. There is strong progress on CIT across islands; attendees are encouraged to request a CIT-trained officer when calling police. Maui trains recruits during academy; Oahu continues scaling amid staffing constraints. CIT training is weeklong and therefore staff coverage during such training can be a challenge due to workforce shortage. This may help explain why Oahu has trained only 16% of its police force. Council members described the training and the impactful role-play and “hearing voices” exercises; It is the consensus that CIT saves lives.
 - Immediate response to the Kona Low Disaster focused on meeting immediate needs and helping one another as responders to meet needs of disaster affected individuals. Now is the time when mental health crisis is setting in, as affected individuals start to think more of what they lost and recover. Partner agencies are just helping one another

- Provider – Forrest Wells. Disaster response experience at Waialua Family Assistance Center was shared. He encourages emergency management planning to add more than just general volunteer navigators with PFA-training at intake. There is a need for more trained volunteers/clinicians to reduce re-traumatization and better identify immediate behavioral health needs.
- Consumer advocate - Danielle Bergan. YouthLine Hawai'i (Maui) expanded youth-led coverage in evening hours, capturing mainland contacts when Hawai'i is the only youth-staffed center open during those windows.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Carolyn, as support staff, will not be present at the May meeting and Stacy, who is trained now, has ended her internship and will not be there also. AMHD's communication specialist has been tapped to assist the Council with setting up Waimano and Zoom for the meeting.

The Chair thanked members, staff, and guests. She adjourned the meeting at 12:01 p.m.