

**ERIE COUNTY MENTAL HYGIENE COMMUNITY SERVICES BOARD
MINUTES**

March 7, 2024

COMMUNITY

SERVICES BOARD: Terry Alford, Daniel Antonius, Victoria Brooks, Sharon Cavanaugh, Max Donatelli, Stephanie Orlando, Elizabeth Smith, BJ Stasio, Charles Syms, Erica Westphal

GUESTS: Sheriff John Garcia, Erie County Sheriff's Office
Amy Rockwood, ECDMH Director of Planning and Evaluation

MENTAL HEALTH

DEPARTMENT: Mark O'Brien, Shannon Stocker

EXCUSED: Joan Baizer, Kathyne Coric, Emma Fabian, Maya Hu Morabito, Pastor George Nicholas

Approval of Minutes:

- February CSB Minutes were approved.

MH Commissioner Updates:

- Link to 1115 Waiver from DOH was emailed out. DOH has made it clear that they intend these structural changes to be permanent.
- We co-founded the SMART Initiative (School of Mental Health Advocating for Resources Together) with Erie 1 BOCES and it is well represented by Erie 1 and 2 BOCES. School districts across the county are there, from the administration down to guidance counselors and teachers to pull together a school of MH resources for families. Buffalo Public Schools is now represented at the SMART Initiative. OMH has come out with additional funds, \$25,000 for additional startup funds for satellite clinics in schools. The problem remains finding staff. We are seeing Easy Par Applications often on there.
- Living Opportunities of DePaul got awarded an RFP for 80 new Supervised Community Resident beds. They are building a new supervised apartment program by Delaware and Hertle, called Pan-Am Apartments.
- The Opioid RFP's have been out for the \$6M. Some of the agencies resubmitted because they were missing information. Some of the agencies who have been awarded funds have been told what they are getting and how much.
- There has been a lot of progress made at CPEP. A new process was put in place for completing upfront assessments.
- The Crisis Continuum Development continues to work, keeping people out of CPEP, having other resources, and people connecting in a better way.
- The Tower Foundation and the Patrick Lee Foundation will be funding some external facilitators to come in to complete some studies.
- OPWDD Commissioner Kerri Neifeld has resigned her position, giving 90 days' notice. The Acting Commissioner will be the Executive Deputy Commissioner, Willow Baer, who will be taking over in June.

- Thank you, Charles Syms, for appearing before the Legislature when nominated as the ECDMH's representative to the Erie County Corrections Specialist Advisory Board, which looks at jail operations and things of that nature.

Sheriff John Garcia, Erie County Sheriff's Office, Presentation:

- It has been 2 years and 2 months since I became Sheriff. Before that, I worked at Buffalo Police for 25 years, mainly in Narcotics. I then worked in Homicide where I saw more overdose deaths and suicides than I saw homicides. I was a volunteer at the Mental Health Association and was the Commander of the Crisis Negotiations Team. I have suffered loss in my family; a family member took their life from a MH crisis. 14 of my Buffalo Police colleagues committed suicide. For me, MH is a very, very important issue that there is still this huge stigma around.
- I truly believe that people in our custody receive more services when they are in custody than people do out in the community. We've had the implementation of the Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Program about 1 year ago, and it has been a success. We have medication, counseling, and peers in our program. We are hoping the Governor releases some of the Opioid Settlement money to County Correctional Facilities so we can improve these programs because the unfunded mandates are putting a strain on our resources.
- The New Dawn Initiative was facilitated in conjunction with ECDMH and BestSelf Behavioral Health. It is a critical program that provides transitional services for individuals suffering from co-occurring MH and SUD. It's been a great program. It gets funded from year-to-year; we go to the legislature and show it does work.
- We have a successful Detox Dorm program. There is a direct correlation between those suffering from withdrawal and MH. The Dorm setting allows staff to observe them at all times. Those who need to be removed from the Detox Dorm due to being disruptive are closely monitored and returned to the Detox Dorm as soon as possible.
- We have improved the intake screening for dual diagnosis for both substance abuse and MH. It is very important to get information from our detained individual. We are still working on this.
- Our Behavioral Treatment Unit (BTU), that was established for those suffering from personality disorders that don't function very well in general population, has been successful.
- Staffing is one of our biggest problems; no one seems to be applying for jobs. We brought in BestSelf Behavioral Health and Save The Michaels to get programs up and running. Bringing in Sandy Amoia from NYS Dept of Corrections has been very good for us. We received accreditation from the State already last year and we are seeking national accreditation for both correctional health and for our facilities.
- We have very antiquated buildings that we are pushing to consolidate into one. Combining the MAT program, Forensic MH, and kitchens at both locations would save a lot of money that we could use elsewhere. It would also help with the staffing crunch. Our population right now is about 750, probably due to bail reform, it used to be a much higher number. This is not an Erie County issue. The struggle runs throughout the state.
- 57-58% of the people in our custody are on psychotropic medication. About 175 people are in the MAT program in our two facilities. Looking at the suicide attempts (all were unsuccessful) over the last 4 years: 2021 + 2022 had 10, 2023 had 4, and so far in 2024 there have been 0. The MAT program and addressing MH issues in our facilities have helped. We are doing as much as we can with what we have.
- We now have a Wellness Director to help provide MH support for our staff since they have a very difficult job with a lot of trauma.
- Dr. Antonius added that we complete a lot of fitness for duty / psychiatric evaluations for law enforcement throughout the county. We use that opportunity as a first step to talk about MH. He likes to talk to the officers about the resources available to them. Also, the transparency is

important about the fact that you can't see a psychiatrist any faster than going to jail because more staff is needed in the field.

- Elizabeth Smith commended the great work that is being done, especially around MAT, which was very much needed and very stigmatized in the past, especially methadone. There are new resources in the community with outreach to fund medication mobile units that can come out to the jails and the Holding Center to make it easier and alleviate some of the workforce staffing issues that the jails have.
- Max added that there have been some real efforts by ECDMH to look at diversion programs and push crisis stabilization programs to help avoid, as much as possible, people needing to go into the jail or Holding Center.

Chairperson Update:

- Vote on Elissa Lang joining the IDD Subcommittee:
 - o BJ motioned, Erica seconded, no one opposed, motion passed.

Subcommittee Updates:

- MH Subcommittee (Erica):
 - o Last meeting was January 8th. Minutes will be sent out.
 - o Erica has been working with Amy Rockwood from ECDMH on Local Services Plan (LSP) data. They will be discussing the LSP at the next meeting this Monday.
 - o Next meeting will be March 11th.
- IDD Subcommittee (BJ):
 - o Last meeting was January 18th. Minutes will be sent out.
 - o Looking forward to a tabling event on Down Syndrome Awareness Day, March 21st.
 - o Next meeting will be March 21st.
- PASS Subcommittee (Elizabeth):
 - o Last meeting was February 22nd. Minutes will be sent out.
 - o Emma Fabian is interested in participating in our Subcommittee. She has been welcomed to do so as a non-voting member since our membership is currently full.
 - o We are also working on our 2024 Priorities.
 - o Amy Rockwood from ECDMH will be scheduled to attend one of our upcoming meetings to present on the Local Services Plan data.
 - o Next meeting will be March 28th.

Amy Rockwood, ECDMH, Erie PATH Update:

- As of the last report, which was through the end of February, we have had 77,600 visitors and 6.74 million hits. We are continuing to expand and work on it. We had a meeting last month with the EC Disability Council to work with them more closely and have some focus groups around improving accessibility and figuring out the best screen reader technology that we should be applying so there are more color blind and other sensitivity option available.

Next Meeting:

- Thursday, April 4, 2024 @ 9:00am.