

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

**ANNUAL MEETING**

January 8, 2026  
Webex, 9:00am – 10:00am

COMMUNITY

SERVICES BOARD: Daniel Antonius, Victoria Brooks, Sharon Cavanaugh, Max Donatelli (Secretary), Emma Fabian, Jane Mogavero, Pastor George Nicholas, Stephanie Orlando (Chair), Christopher Ramnauth, Elizabeth Smith, BJ Stasio (Vice Chair)

MENTAL HEALTH

DEPARTMENT: Sarah Bonk, Shannon Stocker

EXCUSED: Esther Annan, Charles Syms

ABSENT: Terry Alford, Elda Pichardo

QUORUM PRESENT: Yes  
(a majority of the members of the Board)

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**Approval of Minutes:**

- November Minutes were approved. Motion made by Max, seconded by Pastor George, no discussion, all in favor, no one opposed, no abstentions.

**Subcommittee Updates:**

- MH Subcommittee (Jane):
  - o Last meeting was November 10<sup>th</sup>. Minutes will be sent out.
  - o In reviewing membership composition requirements, we need:
    - 3 members of the CSB Board on the Subcommittee – Sharon offered to join, so we will add her. Chris and Jane are on, so that will meet this requirement.
    - 2 members who are family members or advocates of persons with lived experience, as well as two additional people with lived experience. We added a youth MH peer, Nicole Shields. The County reached out to DSS, and they suggested Gretchen Szymanski from Child and Family Services, also to bring that youth services perspective.
    - Resumes have been forwarded to the CSB Executive Committee (they do not need County Executive approval).
    - With the new members we are proposing, we will have all of our seats filled based on these criteria. We can then have one or two non-voting members.
    - MH Subcommittee membership reviewed with CSB. Approved slate of Committee Members for the MH Subcommittee; Jane motioned, Max seconded.
  - o Reviewed Priorities and specific objectives under each of those Priorities in the last meeting, but we will re-review them with the new full roster.
  - o Next meeting will be January 12<sup>th</sup>.
- PASS Subcommittee (Elizabeth):
  - o Last meeting was October 23<sup>rd</sup>. We did not have quorum, so no voting, but we did have discussions and two presenters (BestSelf and Horizons). Highlights will be sent out.
  - o Emma is on both the PASSS and this CSB and announced that she is moving roles professionally from overseeing harm reduction services at Evergreen to Executive

Director of a newer association within NYS called The NYS Harm Reduction Association.

- She will still be an Erie County resident, will still fit in with the CSB and PASSS's membership composition requirements, and can continue to bring a very valuable perspective to these committees.
- Emma agreed to stay on the CSB and the PASSS.
- Next meeting will be January 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- I/DD Subcommittee (Max):
  - Last meeting was November 20<sup>th</sup>. Minutes will be sent out.
  - From ECDMH, Stacey Sinclair took over for Cathleen Larson as coordinator for the I/DD.
  - Statewide advocacy issues were discussed. In particular, early intervention continues to be underfunded. A lot of providers have left the field. Reimbursement rates are really low. We've been involved at the state level with the children's agenda and working with legislators to show the value of early intervention.
  - Housing continues to be a concern. BJ and Max are scheduled to meet today with the Commissioner of OPWDD, Willow Baer, to discuss some housing issues and changes in the system that they would like to recommend.
  - They are also working on Whole Person Supports at the state level and making recommendations to OPWDD, the Dept of Health, the Dept of Mental Health, and the State Education Dept.
  - Discussed the 2026 Priorities, including advocacy, housing, workforce, and community-based care including Consumer Directed Personnel Assistance Programs (CDPAP).
  - Scott Perry from OPWDD discussed some of the issues they are having with some of the more significant family properties.
  - BJ joined this meeting and added in that he and Commissioner Baer are trying to figure out what makes a good strategic plan that they are working on.
  - Next meeting will be January 15<sup>th</sup>.

### **Department Updates:**

- In 2026, we are going to work on our internal processes.
  - We want to loop community feedback into our Local Services Plan process through the CSB.
  - We will continue the work on the crisis part of our continuum with the Crisis to Care Collaborative.
  - Sarah is very hopeful, not only because of the new administration in the City of Buffalo, but specifically because the current, even Interim, Commissioners are folks she has very close working relationships with. For example, the new Director of Economic Development, Doug Massey, has a good working relationship with MH. He also is a true champion of the internal police culture. Low level officers to upper end brass trust him.
  - Kids are still a huge priority area. Sarah sat down with Community Connections of NY (CCNY) yesterday to learn more about the County's Electronic Medical Records (EMRs). There is a lot of room to expand in terms of our ability to directly coordinate care for families and kids.
    - While NYS is simultaneously settling a lawsuit that was brought up by 13 states related to how children's care is coordinated, there is going to be a lot of change, momentum, and focus on kids in 2026 statewide, and Sarah is hoping to sustain that particularly in Erie County.
  - Things continue to be in flux with federal updates.
    - The childcare debacle drama that started in Minnesota is having some federal impacts here for us in NYS. The federal government sent a notice to the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) at NYS saying that they would be freezing the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANIF) funds, the childcare development money, and the social services block grant which funds

children's welfare and foster care for NYS. There is a court injunction, so nobody really knows what is happening yet. As of Monday this week, we as counties were still able to access funds and use them, but, as of today, a formal notice has been sent from the federal government.

- In 2026, we are starting in-person Leadership Meetings and reevaluating who is attending those meetings to help them be productive and to build a community of practice where we can lean on each other as we go through the stressful and financially tough times coming in 2026 + 2027. We are still getting the message at the county level that in 2027, we may face some staff cuts. The county's direct investment right now in our system is only \$9M (but \$4.5M of that is going to 730 Evaluation costs), so realistically, it's only costing Erie County around \$7M to run \$48M worth of non-clinic-based services. So, we need to come together and plan together. To do this, we are meeting with agency leadership once a month. Once a quarter, these meetings will be in person to do some strategic planning, problem solving, issue identification, etc. Our vision is to bring issues that are identified within the community, brought to the ECDMH through the CSB, and present them to the leadership group so we can start working on them.
  - It was stated that we need to find a voice to push back against the hurtful Make America Great Again (MAGA) policy decisions as they affect our citizens' well-being. We need to share information and let people know how this is going to impact them.
    - We left off at our last CSB meeting that the Executive Committee would form a committee to host a Townhall Engagement Meeting. The CSB Subcommittees could ask for volunteers to join in. We need to figure out where it would be and how it would be publicized so it comes across as informational, not partisan.
    - As the CSB, we can present facts, then let the community voice what the impact is to them personally and to their agencies, if that applies.

### **Elections:**

- Executive Committee includes:
  - Stephanie Orlando – Chair
  - BJ Stasio – Vice Chair
  - Max Donatelli – Secretary
- We are all interested in serving again if you will have us, however we are very open to other nominations.
- The agenda that was sent out included descriptions of each position.
- There were no nominations for these positions.
- The slate of Officers including Stephanie, BJ, and Max was approved. Pastor George motioned, Jane seconded, no discussion, all in favor, no one opposed, no abstentions.

### **Miscellaneous:**

- Dr. Celia Spacone is officially retiring from the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Erie County. We are looking to fill her role as Coordinator of the Coalition. We're having our annual in-person breakfast on Feb 25<sup>th</sup>. Chris was asked to circulate this information to this group.
- The Crisis to Care Collaborative released their status report in December, available at <https://crisistocare.org/>. It is a careful analysis of how the crisis response system is working in Erie County.
- Governor Kathy Hochul was in town, has some children's initiatives, and is increasing teen MH First Aid in schools.
- The 2026 Disability Pride Festival will be on Fri, July 24<sup>th</sup> at Buffalo RiverWorks.

### **Next Meeting:**

- Thursday, February 5, 2026, from 9:00-10:00am.