

**Governor's Commission on Alcohol and Other Drugs**  
**Meeting Minutes 06/28/2024**  
**9:30am- 11:30am**  
**NH State House**  
**Executive Council Chambers**

Steve Ahnen, James Bofetti, Alex Casale, Heather Clogston, Amy Daniels, Annette Escalante, Traci Fowler, Katja Fox, Richard Frost, Helen Hanks, Ashley Holmes, David Mara, Matt Mckenney, Marie Noonan, Keith Nyhan, Kathie Saari, Seddon Savage, Patrick Tufts, Sen. David Watters, Lori Weaver

**Chair's Update – Patrick Tufts:**

Patrick welcomed everyone to the meeting, adding we have a stacked agenda with a lot of information to share. He asked for a motion to approve the February meeting minutes.

First: Alex Casale      Second: Steve Ahnen      All in favor. None Opposed. Motion Carries.

Patrick introduced a new member, Keith Nyhan, then turned it over to the Granite Youth Alliance to show and discuss some of their work.

**Guest Speaker(s):**

Vickie Harris from Dover Youth to Youth spoke about the group and the changes they are making in their communities. The students work with adult advisors to build the skills they need. GYA is funded by G UW and supports 7 different teams in the Seacoast region, who meet in their schools weekly to work on their projects.

They hold a fall conference to train and empower students, and at the end of the school year, they hold their film festival. Students come up with short films which they pitch to a panel of adults. They get \$350 of funding to go back into their communities and make their films, the production of which are all student led. They presented their films in June at Portsmouth Music Hall. Vickie played some of their videos to show the commission what they had been working on all year. The first video focused on the power of saying no and resisting peer pressure. Some of the students from Raymond who produced the video spoke about how they came up with their idea to show different situations where peer pressure could come up.

The second video involved a court case with underage drinking. They focused on the alcohol industry and how they advertise their products to kids. An acted-out scene showed a teenage boy who accidentally bought alcoholic drinks from a gas station and ended up in the hospital. The students who worked on this film said their goal was to educate parents and students about harmful packaging of alcoholic products that are too similar to products kids tend to buy and entice teens to drink.

Senator Watters, along with the Liquor Commission, has been trying to increase state legislation over these high-risk products. The students have been meeting with him to help write up bills. He has been wonderful about listening to the youth speak and they thanked him for his commitment to the cause. Vickie passed out a flyer with a QR code that would allow people to watch the other 5 videos. Patrick asked the commission to entertain a motion to promote these videos to schools and distribute them out so more people can see them.

First: Senator Watters Second: Commissioner Hanks All in favor. None opposed. Motion carries.

Patrick thanked the NH Liquor Commission for always being willing to work with our organizations to keep people safe. Next, the Commission viewed an ad for 211 about getting help, which is playing on the advertisement loop at liquor stores. The ad plays frequently on multiple screens throughout the store. This was due to a letter of recommendation from the Commission a few months ago, and it was nice to see it come to fruition. Seddon Savage congratulated everyone on their inspiring and wonderful films. She added that it is also important to focus on the health implications of alcohol use even without a substance use disorder, and a presentation on that would be helpful. Patrick agreed.

Chief Mara had asked Patrick to set aside a little time for the Georges to come forward and speak to the Commission. Adeline and Tony George spoke about their son, Randy George. They want to give parents and caregivers the ability to help their loved ones. Randy was born in 1982 and died in 2022. He had a daughter who was 15 when he passed away. He loved hunting and fishing and was a hero and role model to his nieces and nephews. He ran numerous marathons to raise money for veterans. In 2018, he began to experience back issues and arthritis, which led him to visit pain clinics for medication. Unfortunately, he turned to street drugs when he could no longer get his medication. This led to a deep depression and addiction. He struggled for a long time, but worked hard to get better, and used his creative imagination to make a wishing well. He was great with woodworking and wanted to start a business. After a while, he began to struggle with drugs again, and his depression got worse. Sadly, he was unwilling to get help, and his parents were not able to do anything about it. Two days after his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, Randy died from fentanyl poisoning. His parents believe he purchased it thinking it was pain medication. They lamented that there is no way to force someone to get help even if they can't take care of themselves, adding that we need to change our system that is failing our loved ones. Drug addiction is not a choice and is not in someone's control once they are addicted. The Georges have asked the system to be changed to allow a family member to get someone the help they need. Patrick thanked both for their courage in sharing their story and reminding us of the important work and human factor that we are fighting for.

James Bofetti spoke next about the Purdue Pharma case. Yesterday, the Supreme Court decided on a bankruptcy settlement over the makers of Oxy-Contin using deceptive marketing practices. Purdue Pharma, which is owned by the Sackler family, filed for bankruptcy in 2019 after facing thousands of lawsuits regarding their deceptive marketing, which alleged that Oxy-Contin was not addictive. The family was granted immunity from future lawsuits after paying \$6 billion in the bankruptcy negotiations, however, that was ruled an overreach. The Sackler family had moved about \$11 billion of profits from Purdue into personal accounts, which was effectively sheltering opioid profits from their company's bankruptcy. There have been actions against them here in NH, including a pending case in Merrimack County. Yesterday's decision was based on whether people like them could use the bankruptcy system in this way. There will be continued efforts for the states coming together to do an intensive mediation with the Sacklers in the next 60 days to see if they can get to a settlement that is fair and just and gets the funds we need to fight the opioid epidemic. They are replicating this model of drug manufacturing in other countries, and there is suspicion that there has been a lot of shifting of assets.

Patrick asked if there was a statement we should be sharing as well. While there isn't one yet, we do want to address it. The Opioid Abatement Commission has sent out \$40 million in various ways. It is estimated that \$10-12 million dollars will be available in other settlements over the next 18 years.

**Public Comment:** John Burns, Executive Director for SOS Recovery, spoke about how Recovery-based contracts encourage and require collaboration with 211, RFW, and other organizations. He pointed out that he now regularly sees this kind of language in contracts, and it often causes duplicative systems that are competing, instead of working together.

#### **Lori Weaver: Commissioner's Update**

Lori shared the press release from yesterday and a summary of the roadmap she spoke about in February's meeting. It sets out the priorities for the upcoming years and will be updated every year. The roadmap can be found online at <https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/news-and-media/nh-dhhs-releases-roadmap-2024-2025> . Lori pointed out the three major commitments in the roadmap: Invest in People and Culture, Promote Thriving Communities, and Improve Customer Service, which the department will fulfill through 15 initiatives and 43 goals designed to benefit all New Hampshire communities. Lori shared that we need to be responsive to those we serve in our system, which can be challenging, but they are looking to make improvements with regards to doing business with the department. As they prepare the budget starting in August, they will be using this. Lori also pointed out the importance of having people with lived experiences sitting at the table.

Katja Fox thanked the students and the Georges for being here, adding that it was important for us to hear from them, and we will carry their experiences with us. She went over the dashboard numbers, which are included in the meeting packet. She referenced the item that was tabled on the agenda, which is reflected in number 7 on the dashboard. This item involves improving school climates around mental health promotion and access to services. They are hoping to get that off the table in July and asked that the Commission generate some chatter about that.

Jenifer Sabin, the State Opioid Response Director, provided an update on the SOR grant. We did not experience the reduction of funding that was feared, and they are preparing applications now. Most of the grant is very similar (about \$29 million every 12 months) and continues to go towards prevention, treatment and recovery of opiate and stimulant use disorder across the state. There is new work in this as well, including a further focus on correctional settings broadly in both county levels and sheriff institutions. There is a specific callout for 16–25-year-olds, vaccine and STD testing, as well as integrative care with SUD. There is also an updated Naloxone plan involving continued broad-based access to that. The last change is about Evidence Based Practice, with specific language around culturally based practices. The grant will be submitted soon and will be effective in September.

Patrick asked for any questions about dashboard number 7. Traci said she hoped the Commission would provide some support on it. She recommended they provide some feedback or write a letter. Patrick said he would issue a letter but would first need to take a vote on that. Patrick asked for a motion.

First: Traci Fowler      Second: Matt McKenney      Heather Clogston abstained. All else in favor.  
Motion carries.

Patrick turned things over to Dave Mara, who updated the commission on the 2024 death report, with the most recent one released on 6/20/24. There were 122 total confirmed drug deaths, with a total of 163 with toxicology. A year ago, there were 130 and 75 with toxicology (205 total). Comparing those numbers, that is a 20.4% decrease. These are encouraging numbers, and he urged everyone to keep doing what they are doing.

### **Task Force Updates**

#### **Budget:**

The focus moving forward will be looking at the remaining funds for FY 25 and working with the task force to prioritize what to bring forward at the August meeting.

#### **Data:**

The data task force is hoping to have a document to present at the next meeting with data sets for the state of NH that are all available in one place. More on that will be coming out. They are working on establishing measures for the state. They have historically looked at the end outcomes and overdose deaths and are stepping back from that and looking at strategies that will improve those numbers. What are we doing in terms of education, pharmacological treatment, and engagement?

Commissioner Hanks said they met in June and had a comprehensive review of Crosswalk with a goal of identifying gaps. The gaps found were around tobacco prevention, fighting the stigma that people continue to face when seeking treatment, the education around harm reduction, integration with health services, and workforce capacity. They would like to take their task force on the road to provide better access for people across the state to participate and to clear up fact vs fiction. There will be meetings in the North Country facility, Exeter, and Lebanon.

Amy Daniels said their current action plan is celebrating its 2-year anniversary today. It is a 3-year plan. We have not yet determined what the best and most appropriate measures are for progress on all the things happening and their potential impact. They recommended extending the plan to be a 5-year plan, so instead of concluding at the end of FY 25, it would continue until the end of FY 27. They are in the process of some very brief edits to the plan. Once those are done, they will rerelease it. Patrick added there will be a transition in the Governor's office, so it makes sense to expand it out and have a plan in place to extend to the next governor and not be in a transition point as the governor is transitioning.

Funding Crosswalk is available on their website. They are actively working on an update to ensure that it reflects FY 25 and all the activities on the DHHS as accurately as they can be captured, in terms of each strategy and its funding source.

#### **Other Business:**

The next meeting will be on August 23<sup>rd</sup> at 9:30 am. Patrick wished everyone a wonderful Fourth of July, thanked all the folks who gave us testimony today, and adjourned the meeting.