

Autism Commission Meeting Minutes
December 13, 2016
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
1 Ashburton Place, Boston, MA

Present: Undersecretary Alice Moore, Carolyn Kain, Michele Brait, Daniel Burke, representative from Rep. Kimberly Ferguson's office, Todd Garvin, Janet George, Ayana Gonzalez, Kasper Goshgarian, Commissioner Elin Howe, Christine Hubbard, Dania Jekel, Patricia Jennings, Jessica Katon for Sen. Richard Ross, Erin Riley for Sen. Barbara L'Italien, Julia Landau, Carolyn Langer, Susan Loring, Patricia Marshall, Sarah Geldart, Deirdre Phillips, Jane Ryder, Kim Clougherty, Vincent Strully, Chris Supple, Judith Ursitti, Amy Weinstock, Rep. Christine Barber, Dianne Lescinskas and Kathleen Stern.

Undersecretary Alice Moore called the meeting to order at about 10:05 a.m. and welcomed the Commission members. The Undersecretary said that the meeting would begin with a presentation from Labor and Workforce Development.

Julia Landau said she would like to make a motion to leave 45 minutes for discussion after the two presentations. Julia's motion was seconded by Christine Hubbard. Motion passed with only Vincent Strully voting Nay.

Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development Presentation

Undersecretary, Jennifer James, from the office of Labor and Workforce Development began her presentation. Ms. James gave the majority of the presentation, and then was available for questions. There being none, Ms. James departed the meeting and Jason Albert completed the presentation, calling attention to specific grants that are available to support individuals with disabilities, (including those with autism). Undersecretary Moore then asked if there were any questions for Mr. Albert.

Ms. Langer asked Mr. Albert if they ever have done a survey on how many of the individuals that they serve have ASD. Mr. Albert responded that individuals do not have to disclose their specific disability, and as a result LWD does not track by disability type. Mr. Burke inquired if they are doing any training with the employers. Mr. Albert said they had a conference about a year ago to focus on all areas of employer development and they work closely with the ICI (Institute for Community Inclusion) and Work without Limits. Mr. Strully asked how Career Centers are relevant to ASD? He commented that in his 40 years at NECC he has not intersected with Labor and Workforce Development. Mr. Albert responded that this is a start and they are implementing a new grant that has a focus on youth. They are reaching out to high schools and will assist in providing a clear career pathway to job training. Ms. Weinstock asked if this new grant was focused solely on Hampden County. Mr. Albert responded that while it is the major focus they can serve others from different areas.

Mr. Goshgarian talked about MRC and WIOA and that they are having regular meetings with Labor and Workforce Development on coordinating services. They work with the Career Centers on augmenting services and are looking forward to improvements along the way.

Ms. Jekel referred to slide 9 and asked if there were any statistics available around sustained employment. She commented that for many it is more difficult to keep a job than it is to get a job. Mr. Albert responded that they do have that information but it is on a case by case situation. Mr. Goshgarian stated that MRC can play a role in providing on-going support for individuals with ASD in the

workplace. He said that 4-6 hours a month of support has been very successful for some individuals. There being no further questions Secretary Moore moved on to approval of minutes from the last meeting of the Commission.

Minute Approval

Undersecretary Moore asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the September 21, 2016 Commission Meeting. Amy Weinstock moved that the minutes be approved and after the motion was duly seconded the minutes were approved unanimously.

Executive Director Update – Autism Commission (Sub-committee work)

Carolyn Kain provided an update and overview on the work that the eight sub-committees have undertaken from June of 2016 – December of 2016. She thanked all of the Commission and sub-committee members for the work that has been done thus far. There have been 29 Sub-committee meetings since June.

Julia Landau noted the work that has been done, but asked about establishing a priority list for each sub-committee. Undersecretary Moore commented that Ms. Kain wanted to highlight all of the good work that has been done by all of the sub-committees and there would opportunities at future meetings to have deeper dives on the sub-committees by their respective Chairs. She said that we can discuss, a way for the Chair of each sub-committee to present on their meetings.

1. Carolyn noted that there were two motions made by the Housing sub-committee one regarding the housing survey and one regarding DDS funding. She said she had updates on the issue of the housing survey and housing options. Ms. Kain reported that she had met with representatives of EOHHS, DHCD and DDS several times regarding current housing options for individuals with ASD. The Secretary has approved a state-wide affordable supportive housing survey. There will be a meeting with Technical Assistance Collaborative (TAC), a national consulting organization on the issue of housing with experience in the Commonwealth's housing portfolio, regarding the scope of this survey.
2. HUD 811 waiver- DHCD and MRC are re-writing the priorities for this program to include persons with autism. (No waitlist for this program)
3. Home Loan Modification Program (HLMP) Cathy Boyle has submitted language on the issue of accessory apartments. CDAC will entertain any application for this program and there has been a commitment by MRC to request additional capital funding annually for this program.

Chris Supple noted the good news on housing but made a point to say that the statute calls for not just a survey but the need for a plan of action around the needs of the individuals for the housing. Carolyn acknowledged that a plan of action is included and what is expected as a result of the survey but that she was highlighting the fact that the survey itself is moving forward.

Julia Landau thought it would be helpful for us to discuss two points:

She feels it is not clear what is expected from the sub-committees for timeframes of recommendations and priorities. How do we want the Commission meetings to look going forward?

Ms. Kain stated that she wanted to clarify, that when each sub-committee began its work she informed them that they would be expected to make both short term and long term recommendations to the Commission. Ms. Kain said she also provided each sub-committee with a draft charge for them to work with. She said that she had not dictated any specific timelines for the submission of recommendations to the Commission but that this issue was ripe for discussion at today's meeting. Ms. Kain said she believes that since the Commission is now a permanent entity that this would be an ongoing process, that she wanted to afford the newly established sub-committees time to learn about the work that has been done, to understand the issues, decide what if any previous recommendations from 2013 should move forward, and what new recommendations they felt should be made to the Commission.

Erin Riley, representing Senator L'Italien, said that several of the recommendations from the presentation today are roll overs from the old commission. She reported that Senator L'Italien has filed legislation on some of the old recommendations, and she suggested that the sub-committees and the Commission members get involved in following the bills to potentially endorse and testify on their behalf. Undersecretary Moore asked Ms. Riley if she has been involved with any of the subcommittees or if she has presented the information about this legislation to any of the sub-committees. Undersecretary Moore asked Ms. Riley if her office has been involved in any of the subcommittee work. Undersecretary Moore then pointed out that while the Commission may make recommendations regarding legislation, the legislative process is a separate and distinct function from that of the Commission.

Erin Riley then summarized the bills filed by the Senator: For ages three to fourteen the school districts are struggling to address student needs, there is a discretionary grant for districts to pursue more professional development to meet the needs of students. Bill 313 will be refiled next session. Private universities and colleges provide more flexibility for documented disabilities. There is a need to address the individuals that show superior skills in one area but lack skills in another. This bill will work on public universities addressing this need. There are two bills for Autism teams at hospitals that will have training on how best to work with ASD individuals- bill S1180 will address this need. And bill S671 will provide scholarships to assist medical students in working with ASD individuals.

Undersecretary Moore said the sub-committee members are advisory in nature but individuals on those sub-committees and individuals on the Commission can directly support the legislation.

Ms. Jekel stated that it is important to have a goal and a clear mandate of what to do on the sub-committees and a timeline. Carolyn responded that she knew this was a concern of some members before today's meeting, but that while some members were also on the previous 2010 Commission there were new members of this Commission, as well as, on the sub-committees, where over 100 individuals participate with diverse expertise and experiences. Carolyn said that she reviewed the statute regarding timelines for this discussion, and there is a requirement for an annual report on or before March 1st. Ms. Kain said that the first annual report had just been filed in October 2016, and that focused on updating the work that had been done since the 2013 report. She said it was also an opportunity to inform all of the members of the Commission and subcommittees on what has occurred since the 2013 report and the enactment of the Omnibus Law in 2014. Undersecretary Moore stated that the October 2016 report could serve to fulfill the requirement for an annual report by this March 1st. Ms. Kain pointed out that the next Commission meeting was on March 6, 2017.

Ms. Weinstock said that when the first commission met they had a game plan; they met before the sub-committees were established. She said the meetings with state agencies making presentations have been very time consuming.

Undersecretary Moore said that Carolyn can and will develop timelines she can propose to the Commission, and that this Commission unlike the other commission is a permanent entity, which operates independently of other state agencies. Undersecretary Moore said we are at a point to take your recommendations on the timing matter. She added that it has been important for this group to review the work being done by other agencies through their respective presentations, and that information will inform our work and support and ensure inter-agency collaboration.

Ms. Ursitti said that 95% of today's presentation from LWD was not about autism and we need to be targeted on autism. She said she wants concrete deadlines for the sub-committees and more in-depth conversations on what the sub-committee Chairs are doing. She said that Carolyn did a good job providing an overview of the subcommittee work but it would be helpful to have more details on the work of each sub-committee.

Ms. Kain then pointed out that while the sub-committees are charged with developing recommendations for the Commission, she also believes that the work should be on-going, like the issue of the housing survey that was discussed at the housing subcommittee meeting. Ms. Kain pointed out that she followed up with several meetings on the housing survey with the state agencies, and now the survey was moving forward. Ms. Kain said she hoped that wherever progress can be made that she and her staff would work with the state agencies to make that happen, and she didn't view that it needed to wait or be reduced to a formal recommendation for the Commission.

Dan Burke asked if as the survey moves forward and the need for financial resources arises how does that issue get addressed, how does it move forward to the Commission, can we take a vote to recommend to the Secretary? Undersecretary Moore said she was clarifying that the state budget process is a separate established process. The Commission is charged with making recommendations on policies and any legislative or regulatory action necessary but the budget of individual state agencies was not a recommendation for the Commission.

Ms. Ursitti asked for clarity around whether or not we could make recommendations relative to funding. She asked if there was any way around the funding issue if state employees don't participate. Undersecretary Moore said that the Commission is a governmental agency and the budget issue will affect other state agencies and there is an established process for that already.

Ms. Landau said that she views the statute differently, as the Commission is within EOHHHS but not subject to it, and that there are budgetary impacts associated with regulatory and legislative action. How are we to raise issues?

Undersecretary Moore said to Ms. Landau that she was here at today's meeting serving as the Chair, and that while they are both lawyers, she wasn't sure this legal discussion should be taking place now. She then said she is interested in hearing from other members on the priorities going forward. Undersecretary Moore said as Commission members you all have the ability to talk with and to meet with Ms. Kain around priorities.

Mr. Supple said that he sits on many boards and commissions and he doesn't think our hands are tied by anything. This is an interesting group and you can still move things forward separate from the budget issue. He said if there is a quorum present you can vote on any issue even if some people need to abstain. He said we need to figure out how to further the work and make recommendations to move things forward. Mr. Supple said that he feels that recommendations without financial recommendations are pretty much meaningless.

Representative Christine Barber said she came to the meeting for to get an understanding of the issues for the families and advocacy groups that she serves. She said that as they are working on legislation it would be helpful to have the commission behind them and she hopes we can work together.

Commissioner Howe said she is interested in seeing things get done and that she is looking at the subcommittee work and wants to move forward the work that can be done now; training for DCF workers, better jobs, getting families connected to the Autism Support Centers. We should agree on what can be done and each state agency could go through the list of the subcommittee work and do an analysis of how they can move things forward as part of their work.

Ms. Kain responded by saying that she is working to coordinate the work between the state agencies and not to always have formal recommendations if the work can move forward in a more timely manner. We have a lot of knowledgeable people included in this group and the subcommittees are informing our work, and it should proceed wherever possible as a matter of good practice.

Ms. Landau said that there are two points:

1. Any recommendations the subcommittees want the full Commission to consider should be submitted to Ms. Kain two weeks prior to the meeting to be added to the agenda.
2. The Commission members should also submit agenda items that they see as important for the meeting.

Undersecretary Moore said that the subcommittees have many issues for discussion, and there is also increased pressure to have state agencies work together. Ms. Moore said we haven't had data in the past and as part of this process is that we are ready to step it up. There is data now on ED Boarding and this is the first data we have ever had on this issue. She said that she recently went to a meeting, there is progress being made and at the next meeting Carolyn will provide timelines to the Commission.

Jessica from Senator Ross' office asked about getting a directory from this group to distribute in her office so they could distribute to their constituents to put them in touch with someone from the Commission. Many families are looking for information. She asked if the subcommittees would put the list together. Undersecretary Moore said that they could also connect with Ms. Kain.

Ms. Kain discussed the draft letter she did for the Board of Education in support of the Autism Endorsement for General Education teachers. She asked the Commission to make a motion in favor of the letter. Ms. Landau made a motion to approve the letter it was seconded by Tod Garvin. Ms. Ursitti asked for some clarification on the wording of the letter. Undersecretary Moore said we would backup to discussion prior to taking a vote on the motion. Ms. Landau reviewed the details of the Endorsement for General Education teachers stating that this was not mandatory for teachers but voluntary. It would give them more education on working with students with ASD. Ms. Kain said that a survey was done by DESE and it was favorably supported and she previously had sent that survey out to the entire Commission. Ms. Kain then read the draft letter out loud.

Ms. Ursitti asked if there was a risk that schools will try to substitute the teachers with this certification for the dilution of services. It was stated that it is not meant to take the place of a BCBA but to give more knowledge and education to teachers that are working with these students. Ms. Geldart from DESE said that she is the lead on this endorsement and that it is a way to increase inclusion opportunities and support the students with ASD in the least restrictive environment. Ms. Landau said that it doesn't change the licensure of the General Education teacher and said that they could make sure that it is called the Autism Endorsement for General Education teachers to ensure that the name tells the story.

Undersecretary Moore said that there being no more discussion we would vote on authorizing Ms. Kain to send the letter to the Mass. Board of Education. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Landau asked if we needed a motion on the working groups for timelines. Ms. Kain said that she will provide timelines and structure and will send out a draft. Undersecretary Moore said that this is an internal policy of the Commission.

Ms. Kain said that she would look at the dates for quarterly meetings. She said the next meeting was after the March 1st date and that the annual report had just been filed in October. Ms. Kain stated that some of the recommendations of the subcommittees may take more work and time.

Undersecretary Moore said that any report that is filed would be presented to the Commission as was the previous report. Christine Hubbard remarked that there are legislative timelines that will dovetail with the filing of reports and we should look at those schedules. Undersecretary Moore responded that we will consider this when Ms. Kain makes a recommendation on the timeline for recommendations from the subcommittees.

Ms. Jekel asked if the members that are presented at this meeting could be added to the minutes. The last meeting minutes did not reflect the names of people that were present.

There being no further business, upon motion duly made, seconded and approved. Undersecretary Moore adjourned the meeting at 12:04 p.m.