

Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities - Spring Council Meeting
Thursday, April 24 – Friday, April 25, 2025

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Attendees:

Council Members: Melissa Barwick, Lori Campbell, Jessica Cowell, Mark Crenshaw, Ben Dell, Dorothy Harris, Rena Harris, Martha Haythorn, Dayna Holbel, Nandi Isaac, Tais Kaiser, Brook Kubik, Lisa Newbern, Evan Nodvin, Sharifa Peart, Charity Roberts, Crystal St. Pierre-Stackpole, Jennifer Snyder, Zolinda Stoneman, Dave Ward

Staff: Charlotte Densmore, Felicia Dillon, Ariel Edwards, Tonya Fair, Tianna Faulkner, Eric Foss, Harry Nelson, Charlie Miller, Fanta Mitchell, Maria Pinkelton, D'Arcy Robb

Guests: Eunique Banner – ASL Interpreter, Lisa Call, Marsha Coles-Felix – ASL Interpreter, Neil Davis, Gavin Delisser, Dr. Yovanda Horton, Devika Rao, Ann Searcy

Welcome, Introductions, Announcements and Meeting Overview: Lisa Newbern called the meeting to order, Martha Haythorn read the GCDD statement of place, and the attendees introduced themselves.

Lisa Newbern asked for announcements.

Lisa Newbern previewed the meeting agenda.

Council Business:

D'Arcy Robb and other GCDD staff presented updates for the GCDD five-year plan, budget and hiring information; save the dates; council meeting preferences; and consent agenda items for vote on day 2.

Lisa Newbern spoke about the consent agenda and the October 2024 and January 2025 meeting minutes.

D'Arcy Robb gave national updates: Council funding; Administration on Community Living (ACL); advocacy areas of focus; Medicaid; Federal Department of Education section 504 Lawsuit; and DEI.

- 70% of GCDD's funding is federal, coming from ACL. Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., announced ACL is being dissolved and programs will go to other federal agencies. GCDD does not receive all federal funding at once, but through Notices of Awards (NOAs). DD council Spring NOAs are going to be late. GCDD is outlining contingency plans.
- She talked about the leaked document from the federal government, a pre-decision with the idea to stop funding DD Councils in the next budget year. The document also included information about ending funding for other agencies: Georgia Advocacy Office (GAO), Head Start, etc. She stated no decisions have been made, gave members the opportunity to ask questions and give comments, and recognized GCDD staff members continue to do good work, connecting and collaborating with

DD Network partners (GAO, DBHDD, IHDD) and putting together information about the impact and value of Council and the DD Network.

Public Policy:

- Charlotte Densmore and Charlie Miller spoke about the work during session, work to come in the off season (federal and state level advocacy, and study committees) and Georgia as a Model Employer.
- They also covered Senate Bill 55 (and its history as HB1125), how a bill becomes a law and the legislative process and wins and losses during the legislative session.
- **Wins:**
 - **Ending 14c (SB 55)** – gives sheltered workshops two years to pay people at federal minimum wage.
 - **Behavioral Health Reform (233)** – increases the Behavioral Health Commission from 24 to 30 members (I/DD provider, a leader of I/DD advocacy group, a parent of a person with intellectual disabilities.
 - **Intellectual disabilities and the death penalty (HB 123)** – changes the burden of proof to align with all other states, so Georgia will no longer execute people with intellectual disabilities.
- **Losses:**
 - Waiver waitlist – only 200 new waiver slots added; advocated for more NOW/COMP waivers
 - Guardianship Expansion (HB 36) bill is moving forward, but GCDD advocacy helped limit who can approve guardianship. Additional language allows proposed wards to challenge the competency of their evaluators.
- Council member and Public Policy Committee Chair Brook Kubik gave a report about the Disability Policy Seminar

Program Update:

Madeline Smith, Georgia as Model Employer (GAME) Training Team Member and owner of Blind Bear Creative, Inc., discussed “Be a GAME Changer” from GAME Training.

Educational Games:

Public Policy – Charlotte and Charlie led an interactive activity for attendees to test their legislative knowledge.

Fanta Mitchell led another interactive game, “What Would You Do? Members Best Practices,” to help Council members better understand rules and their roles.

Member and Staff Recognition:

Council Members: Nandi Isaac, Dorothy Harris and Evan Nodvin will end their service as council members over the summer. Staff and council members thanked them for their service and dedication to GCDD.

GCDD Staff: Charlotte Densmore will leave GCDD at the end of June. Staff and council members thanked Charlotte Densmore for her service and dedication to GCDD.

Meeting ended for the day.

Friday, April 25, 2025

Attendees:

Council Members: Melissa Barwick, Lori Campbell, Jessica Cowell, Ben Dell, Dorothy Harris, Rena Harris, Martha Haythorne, Dayna Holbel, Nandi Isaac, Tais Kaiser, Brook Kubik, Lisa Newbern, Evan Nodvin, Sharifa Peart, Charity Roberts, Crystal St. Pierre-Stackpole, Jennifer Snyder, Zolinda Stoneman

Staff: Charlotte Densmore, Felicia Dillon, Ariel Edwards, Tonya Fair, Tianna Faulkner, Eric Foss, Harry Nelson, Charlie Miller, Fanta Mitchell, Maria Pinkelton

Guests: Lisa Call, Neil Davis, Monique Johnson – ASL Interpreter, Devika Rao, Ann Searcy, Leah Soller

State Agency Reports:

Lori Campbell, DBHDD: She shared information about 3 work groups that will make recommendations, including evaluating a third waiver, the work plan from Guide House, which includes addressing the planning (waiting) list that has 7,900 people on it, and an urgency tool to which behavioral and medical components have been added.

She also covered the new Crisis Service and Diagnostic Center in Macon that is working in partnership with River Edge and Mercer Medical Center. The grand opening will be in June.

In addition, there are two more pilot projects: 1) two CMS-approved community living arrangement (CLA) homes in Augusta; and Georgia Uplift, a resource for direct service providers (DSPs) who may have challenges with childcare assistance. With Uplift, 80% of DSP jobs have been retained.

Lori also shared results of a two-year workforce development program that included 3 competency-based programs: e-badge academy; TAP Training for DSPs; and an apprentice program in partnership with the Georgia Department of Labor.

Rena Harris, GAO: – The agency is working to finalize a new website, including adding accessibility tools; the site is scheduled to launch June 1. GAO is monitoring all services from HHS for community and developing a contingency plan. Staff changes at GAO include retirements of the Chief Financial Officer and Chief Operating Officer.

Charity Roberts with Ga Department of Education – Division name changed from Special Education to Division of Exceptional Children. The Division received 130 applications for people who want to be involved in the state special education advisory panel. Discussed work of a Medicaid Services division who is monitoring a service program to bring about compliance regarding student progress as the agency works to ensure students' graduate.

Ben Dell, GVRA: Ben discussed GVRA's support for IPSE programs. There are 39 graduates being supported to pursue Competitive Integrated Employment, 12 residents being supported to attend out of state programs, and 90 GA residents being supported at in state programs. Ben also discussed 2024 Project Search outcomes, which show 128 students completed the program and 75.6% are employed; 54% of these participants are employed according to Project Search criteria, which means they are working at least 16 hours/week, aren't seasonal, and making at or above the typical wage in an integrated setting. Two new Project Search sites will open in Baldwin and Bulluck Counties this Fall. GVRA hired transition liaisons to lead the Pathways to Dreams program, which organizers are trying to implement in earlier grades to prepare students for transition after high school.

Melissa Barwick, DHS: April is Senior Hunger Awareness Month and Child Abuse Prevention Awareness Month. During session, a bill was passed, SR310, that created a Senate Study Committee. This committee will primarily look for additional services and resources for youth that age out of the foster care system. A House Study committee was also introduced through, HR 61, which would look for solutions for children abandoned after being discharged from the hospital. Both committees will meet this summer. Self-service kiosks in each county to access Gateway benefit services like Medicaid, SNAP, WIC.

Sharifa Peart, DPH: The Georgia Child Health Conference will be held virtually September 28 -30. The conference is for early intervention providers, health care professionals, families and the public health workforce.

CMS Health Care Transition Institute will be held June – July for 10 youth/young adults.

Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant Needs Assessment and Five-Year Strategic Plan is still under way. The Department hosted a Title V Partner Meeting March 24th as part of the needs assessment process.

Zolinda Stoneman, IHDD: Hosted event last month at a theater in Athens, GA, that more than 100 people attended to address the importance of inclusive public education. The grand opening of the Harriet Tubman Museum in Macon is May 18.

Consent Agenda:

Nandi Isaac motioned, Evan Nodvin seconded, and the vote was unanimously approved.

Committee Meetings and Reports:

- **Public Policy Committee:** Discussed plan for public policy survey and the legislative agenda for 2026, including creating a bill about supportive decision-making versus guardianship. Working on study committee for police training for people with I/DD.
- **State Plan Committee:** Discussed future learning opportunities regarding outputs and impact of our work. Also discussed federal issues and new Together We Care grant. Reviewed contracts, sole sourcing and non-competitive renewals, and sustainability of projects if GCDD no longer funds programs.

- **PAC Committee:** Discussed focus group and ways to address issues. Determining work spaces and opportunities for people with IDD, connection in networks and eligibility for waivers that may bring better changes to systems.

Public Comment:

Maria Pinkelton read an email from Mike and Marcia Tootle about their daughter Lindsey.

Closing Comments:

Lisa Newbern encouraged Council members to support GCDD's advocacy efforts, focusing on Medicaid and the DD Network. She also offered an opportunity for attendees to share final words and get lunch.

Next Meeting:

August 7-8, 2025.

Adjournment:

All members voted to adjourn the meeting.