

**GEAUGA COUNTY BOARD OF MENTAL HEALTH
AND RECOVERY SERVICES**

Dr. Steven Oluic
Chairman of the Board

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Board Minutes

OCTOBER 15, 2025

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Reba Dykes, James Lee Holden, Kathy Johnson, Douglas Lundblad, Steven Oluic, Michael Petruziello, Patricia Varanese

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: Mary Ruth Shumway

STAFF PRESENT: Christine Lakomiak, Jim Mausser, Michelle Maneage, Teresa Slater

GUESTS: Melanie Blasko (Lake-Geauga Recovery Centers), Kathy Franz (Geauga League of Women Voters), Vicki Clark (Ravenwood Health), Newell Howard (GCTP), Michelle Bertman (Catholic Charities), Andrea Gutka (WomenSafe), Tia Lawrence (Torchlight Youth Mentoring Alliance)

I. CALL TO ORDER, ROLL CALL, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chairman Oluic called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. Mr. Holden called the roll for attendance, and the following Board members were present: Reba Dykes, James Lee Holden, Kathy Johnson, Douglas Lundblad, Steven Oluic, and Michael Petruziello. Patricia Varanese arrived at 6:06 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES FROM SEPTEMBER 17, 2025

Mr. Holden moved to waive the reading of, and approve, the Minutes as presented. Mr. Petruziello seconded the motion. There was no discussion. **ROLL CALL VOTE: AYES-6; NAYS-0; ABSTENTIONS-0. MOTION APPROVED.**

III. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Dr. Oluic welcomed everyone and reported the following:

- The expansion of the Transitional Living Center is on track with weekly meetings. He suggested driving by to see all the work being done if you haven't already done so.
- The Board has been talking about the need for a new sign and whether it should be digital or standard. This will be discussed again later in the meeting.

IV. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Director Lakomiak gave the following updates:

Statewide Updates:

OhioMHAS has officially changed its name to the Ohio Department of Behavioral Health (DBH), evolving to better serve Ohioans by using updated language that reflects the health of the whole person.

Director Cornyn has left the Ohio Department of Behavioral Health. The Interim Director is Tia Marcel Moretti; she was the right-hand person of Director Cornyn. Crisis services will continue to be prioritized, and OhioDBH's next primary focus will be implementing adult mobile crisis services, similar to those already implemented for children and families through Mobile Response Stabilization Services (MRSS).

Ohio Department of Development Audit: The audit was done in conjunction with relevant Ravenwood Health staff. There were zero findings. The reviewers included several complimentary notes in their report. The Board was commended for the services provided to low-income and homeless individuals as required by the grant, and it was noted that all verification of eligibility was included in the charts.

Board Updates:

The 2026-2028 Community Assessment Plan is due January 31, 2026. It is required that an updated plan be completed every three years. Staff have identified the data that needs to be collected and will implement several different data collection strategies. A comprehensive overview detailing the process and demonstrating the staff's decision-making procedures will be prepared. The strategic plans created for the Suicide Prevention Coalition and the Opiate HUB will be utilized in conjunction with focus groups and surveys.

Staff are working with local schools to update their emergency plans and provide education on 988. A focus group was held to determine what students need and want during a crisis. Free 988 materials have been received and shared with the schools. If necessary, additional 988 materials from the Board Association are available at no cost. Handouts created educate students on what happens when they call 988. Someone does not have to be in an emergency or crisis to use 988. A person may need someone to talk to during a tough time or to help find local resources. The state has adopted the use of 988 for all behavioral health hotline services. The Board is unlikely to fund CopeLine in the future, as it duplicates the services offered by 988. Director Lakomiak has been in contact with Vicki Clark from Ravenwood and has met with other agencies affected by the discontinuation of CopeLine. The state is supportive of making this a streamlined transition.

Senate Bill 138 will change ORC Section 340 by clarifying language and addressing issues of contracting and what boards fund. Director Lakomiak will compile an updated version of board responsibilities under Section 340.

Director Lakomiak reported that the new crisis response coordinator has been deploying counselors during crisis situations and events. She thanked the agency staff who participated in the callouts, many of whom are NOVA (National Organization for Victim Advocacy) certified. The coordinator has also made inroads, engaging with the Amish community and building

relationships. There has been an increased outreach from the Amish community seeking support and services as a result.

The Suicide Fatality Review Committee reviewed all ten deaths in 2025. A recommendation was made to collaborate with trustees about posting 988 signage in various areas. Director Lakomiak will request to be added to the agenda at their next meeting for this purpose.

Our Board contracted with Ravenwood Health and Family Pride to host a Safety Planning Training on September 19th, which was attended by 57 people representing 14 agencies. Everyone who attended received a packet containing coping skills/safety plan information.

The Board is partnering with the Ohio Department of Behavioral Health to hold a 40-hour peer recovery support training from October 20th to 24th at the Board office.

NAMI Geauga County is holding a QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper Training on November 6th at the Board office. This training is offered free of charge to providers and the community.

Mr. Petruziello asked how many of the people who died by suicide or overdose are in the Geauga County system of care. Director Lakomiak replied that the Fatality Review Board reviews this information, and they did not find any systemwide information on five of the individuals. The next step is to gather additional information for review and suggest recommendations. (One of the recommendations already made is to have 988 signage at township parks.)

Mr. Lundblad asked if the crisis team reached out to the Amish family that was robbed. Director Lakomiak responded that they have been invited to provide support.

V. BOARD REVIEW AND ACTION ITEMS

A. Resolution 25-10-1 Reimbursement to the Geauga Safety Center 1st Half SFY2026

Mr. Holden moved to approve the Resolution. Ms. Johnson seconded the motion. Discussion: Director Lakomiak reported that the Geauga Safety Center will be reimbursed \$12,494.00 for psychotropic medications dispensed to inmates. **ROLL CALL VOTE: AYES-7; NAYS-0; ABSTENTIONS-0. MOTION APPROVED.**

B. Resolution 25-10-2 Recovery Housing Allocation to Lake-Geauga Recovery Centers SFY2026

Mr. Holden moved to approve the Resolution. Ms. Johnson seconded the motion. Discussion: Director Lakomiak explained that historically, the agency received an allocation for this purpose outside of the RFP process due to specific funding received from the state. Funding streams for SFY2026 were collapsed into fewer allocation lines; however, these particular funds can still be used for this purpose. **ROLL CALL VOTE: AYES-7; NAYS-0; ABSTENTIONS-0. MOTION APPROVED.**

C. Financial Reports

Mr. Mausser reported on the following for September 2025:

- 22.1% of the Board's SFY2026 administrative budget was expended.
- Geauga County calendar year expenses through September were just over \$5.7 million.
- The Auditor's Fund Balance at the end of September was just over \$2.89 million.
- Voucher Recap #711 for September: \$682,637.84.

VI. OLD BUSINESS

a. Board Sign Discussion

The Board discussed replacing the current sign with either a standard or digital sign. Mr. Petruziello mentioned that the programs discussed earlier could be shown on a digital sign for the public. Ms. Dykes expressed uncertainty about how effective a digital sign would be given the location. Ms. Johnson noted that the speed limit in front of the office is 45 mph. She conducted a study traveling at that speed and could only read three or four words at a glance. There is not enough time to read a lengthy message. She believes that speed and the ability to read a digital sign could be problems. Mr. Lundblad suggested that posted messages could remain static for a longer period and not scroll.

Mr. Lundblad asked if the Board had ever advertised on billboards. He suggested that 988, or other available services, could be placed in specific areas on a billboard for a certain amount of time. Mr. Petruziello likes the idea of billboards but feels something more is needed at this building. He feels the state may be willing to reduce the speed limit in this area to 35. Some trees and underbrush will also need to be removed to make the sign more visible. Director Lakomiak said one quote for a standard sign was received.

The Board took a poll to determine whether to move forward with a digital sign or a standard sign. Funding for the sign will come from unencumbered reserves. Those who would like a digital sign: Mr. Petruziello, Dr. Oluic, Mr. Lundblad, Ms. Varanese, and Mr. Holden. Board members who would like a standard sign: Ms. Dykes and Ms. Johnson. Mr. Petruziello commented that Electolite in Chesterland does good work. Staff will reach out to see if Electolite would like to submit a written proposal.

RESOLUTION 25-10-3 PURCHASE OF DIGITAL SIGN FOR ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES:

Mr. Petruziello moved to authorize the Executive Director to expend up to \$40,000 for the design, fabrication, and installation of a digital sign at 13244 Ravenna Road. Mr. Holden seconded the motion. No further discussion. **ROLL CALL VOTE: AYES-5; NAYS-2; ABSTENTIONS-0. MOTION APPROVED.**

b. Administrative Building Roof

Director Lakomiak reported that staff is gathering information about heating tapes and electrical outlets to help prevent ice backup and roof damage.

c. Advocacy to Abolish Gambling

Director Lakomiak reached out to the state to inform them that the Board has been discussing effective advocacy for the purpose of abolishing gambling and requested any suggestions they may have. The state provides funding that is allocated to Lake-Geauga Recovery Centers for a staff position for this purpose. Lake Geauga also has several counselors certified in gambling addiction. Mr. Petruziello stated that he feels the legislature created a burden on local entities and a crisis for mental health providers by allowing gambling and with it the need to address any related problems. Melanie Blasko, Director of Lake-Geauga Recovery Centers, commented that we can't go backwards, but Lake Geauga did see a big uptick in addiction when online gambling was allowed. Director Lakomiak will bring suggestions back to the Board regarding advocacy and reach out to Mr. Petruziello for help and support.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

a. WomenSafe

In 2023, a capital project proposal was submitted in order to upgrade the bathrooms at WomenSafe at a cost of up to \$70,000. The application included a match amount of \$35,000 from the Board. The project was approved by the state. WomenSafe is now in need of \$30,000 for the project. The Board's funds are set aside in the capital reserve fund. The shelter has a significant issue with its septic system, and renovating the bathrooms allowed it to continue operating on-site. Without the upgrades, they would be forced to shut down or relocate for several months. The septic system still needs to be upgraded, at an estimated cost of \$800,000. WomenSafe has already incurred the cost for the updated bathrooms, and the Board has already set aside the matching funds. Director Lakomiak recommended that the Board move forward with allocating funds to WomenSafe. **RESOLUTION 25-10-4 ALLOCATION TO WOMENSAFE FOR SHELTER BATHROOM UPGRADES:** Mr. Petruziello moved to allocate \$30,000 to WomenSafe as partial reimbursement of the cost to upgrade the bathrooms at the shelter. Ms. Johnson seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. **ROLL CALL VOTE: AYES-7; NAYS-0; ABSTENTIONS-0. MOTION APPROVED.**

b. TLC Expansion

Director Lakomiak reported that there have been some change orders, but the project is still on budget. Several Board members attend the meetings and are instrumental in the decision-making process. Director Lakomiak also provides updates several times a month to keep all members apprised. Some of the changes have been minor, while others have resulted in cost savings.

c. Ravenwood Health

Vicki Clark, Ravenwood CEO, reported that the agency and Community Counseling are working toward the merger with a target date of February 2, 2026. Things are proceeding smoothly. Both boards have met and are scheduled to actually vote on the merger within the next few weeks. Paul Bolino, President and Chief Executive Officer of Community Counseling, will preside over the new entity. It will remain Ravenwood Health under that tax ID. The main site will be located on Ravenwood Drive. Ms. Clark said she has worked closely with Community Counseling, and both agencies have a similar culture and clients. From a business standpoint, the merger makes the most sense.

d. Funds Transfer

Director Lakomiak stated that Ohio Revised Code 340.041 grants the executive director the authority to set staff salaries. She requested the Board transfer \$9,000.00 for staff merit/salary increases into salaries, Medicare, and OPERS line items. During the county budgeting process before the County Commissioners, the board is instructed to submit the budget without including merit or raise provisions. The departments under the County Commissioners are then directed to reallocate funding for this purpose. Since our board is not under the county commissioners, our salary line item remains unchanged. Ms. Johnson moved to approve the transfer of \$9,000.00 for the purpose of staff merit/salary raises. Chairman Oluic stated that a motion was not needed and that a discussion was needed. Ms. Johnson noted that a motion must be made to allow for discussion. Ms. Varanese seconded the motion. The Board debated whether to enter an executive session to discuss compensation, as this is the historical practice. Director Lakomiak stated that there is no need to go into executive session because the director establishes staff salaries within the approved budget by the board of directors, as outlined in ORC 340.041 and in Geauga Board of MH & RS Policy and Procedures. Mr. Petruziello then moved to enter into executive session to discuss employee compensation. There was no second. Director Lakomiak stated that the Board's Policy and Procedures specify that the board determines the executive director's salary, and the director establishes staff compensation. Allocating the funding provides the director with the opportunity to offer merit increases. Chairman Oluic said he has requested additional information that has not been received yet, and he is not ready to move forward at this time. Mr. Petruziello believes that compensation discussions should take place in an executive session. Mr. Holden stated that going into executive session is best practice. Chairman Oluic recommended tabling this matter and scheduling a special meeting for this purpose. Mr. Holden agreed.

VIII. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Andrea Gutka from WomenSafe thanked the Board for the funding to reimburse the agency to update the bathrooms at the shelter.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted by:

Teresa Slater
Administrative/Office Manager

Steven Oluic
Chairman of the Board

James Lee Holden
Secretary of the Board