GEAUGA COUNTY BOARD OF MENTAL HEALTH AND RECOVERY SERVICES

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Board Minutes **October 21, 2026**

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Reba Dykes, David Fabig, James Lee Holden, Kathy Johnson, Douglas Lundblad, Richard J. Mlakar Jr., Steven Oluic, Patricia Varanese

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: Melody Coniglio

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

GUESTS: Kathy Franz (League of Women Voters Geauga), Paul Bolino (Ravenwood Health), Mary Wynne-Peaspanen (Signature Health), Angi Daugherty (Family Pride), Michelle Bertman (Lake Geauga Recovery Centers), Kristy Mowry (Red Tulip Project), Tia Lawrence (Torchlight Youth Mentoring Alliance), Andrea Gutka, Liz Brant (WomenSafe), Michael Petruziello, Mary Ruth Shumway, Char Kuchta (Community Members)

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, David Fabig, James Lee Holden, Kathy Johnson, Douglas Lundblad, Richard J. Mlakar Jr., Steven Oluic, and Patricia Varanese. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. SWEARING IN OF NEW BOARD MEMBER:

Mr. Richard J. Mlakar, Jr. was appointed by the Geauga County Board of Commissioners on September 15, 2026, to serve through June 30, 2030. The Oath of Office was delivered to Mr. Mlakar by Teresa Slater, Notary Public.

III. APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES FROM SEPTEMBER 16, 2026

Mr. Holden moved to waive the reading of the minutes and approve them as presented. Ms. Johnson seconded the motion. There was no discussion. **VOICE VOTE: AYES-8; NAYS-0; ABSTENTIONS-0. MOTION APPROVED.**

IV. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Chairman Oluic welcomed Mr. Mlakar to the Board.

V. RECOGNITION OF MICHAEL PETRUZIELLO AND MARY RUTH SHUMWAY

Chairman Oluic presented Mr. Petruziello with a certificate and plaque recognizing his eight years on the Board, including several years as treasurer. He thanked Mr. Petruziello for his commitment to the community, business perspective, and stewardship of local, state, and federal resources. Chairman Oluic reflected on Mr. Petruziello's connection with the broader community and interactions with other county boards. Mr. Petruziello expressed appreciation for the recognition and emphasized due diligence and support for agencies serving the community as a board member.

Chairman Oluic next presented Ms. Shumway with a certificate and plaque honoring her eight years on the Board and acknowledged her even longer service to the county in various capacities. Chairman Oluic reflected on her eventful tenure and recognized her warmth and compassion, particularly toward young people. He noted her distinct perspective, candor and openness, her careful review of reports and details, and her attentive listening. Ms. Shumway shared that her time as a Board member has led her to advocate for wards of the court and help others from a different perspective.

Dr. Oluic said he is honored to have served on the board with Mr. Petruziello and Ms. Shumway; he can't thank them enough for what they have both done for the county.

VI. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Director Lakomiak thanked Mr. Mlakar for agreeing to serve on the Board. She met with him twice and is excited to bring his perspective and expertise as a Board member.

Director Lakomiak provided the following updates:

Adult Crisis Service Centers: Ohio built crisis centers in partnership with the legislature, the state, local boards, and providers. The state promised a way to pay for them but has not delivered. Now, the state is adding new requirements by rule, without a funding plan and without partners. The Board Association has asked the state to pause the rule until a plan is in place. Other stakeholders are also writing to the Governor – today, Coalition for Healthy Communities requested a pause on the proposed rules. The Board areas that built crisis centers have been operating fully with local levy dollars, and other centers are built but not open because of funding challenges. Medicaid has not released rates for these services either. As a recap, our board opted out of the proposed crisis center discussed several years ago. The TLC expansion has four rooms that would qualify for crisis stabilization if it makes sense in the future to certify them under this category.

Opiate Settlement Funds Grant, Round 2: The Request for Proposal for 2027 will be available on the Board's website on October 23rd. Applications will be due on November 27th. The Commissioners asked that we publish the RFP and vet the proposals received. The Commissioners will make the final funding decision. This grant cycle allows expenses for equipment, such as items that may be used by first responders.

Suicide & Accidental Deaths in 2026: There have been 12 suicide deaths and 5 overdose deaths through September. Fentanyl was a contributing factor in all but one of the overdose deaths. In 2025, there were a total of five overdose deaths and 12 deaths by suicide. There were 30 crisis-related welfare

checks in September, the lowest number since May. Ages ranged from 9 to 71. There were 23 emergency department visits due to attempted suicide and/or suicidal ideation. Youth callouts revolved around suicidal ideation and family conflict; adult callouts revolved around confusion, grief, and medical concerns. When the Sheriff is called out for a family situation, the 24/7 mobile response team is also dispatched.

Peg's Foundation Clear Pathways Program: The initiative focuses on 988/911 interoperability. On October 13th, representatives from Peg's Foundation Clear Pathways, Ravenwood Health, the Sheriff's Office, Emergency Management, and Board staff toured the 988 call center and the 911 dispatch center in Geauga County. The discussion focused on how each system handles calls.

Suicide Prevention Coalition: The Coalition has traditionally met monthly on the second Thursday of each month during the day. A few months ago, Char Kuchta approached Director Lakomiak with the idea of an evening meeting. The first evening meeting was held in October. Evening meetings aim to engage more community members who work full-time. The next evening meeting is scheduled for January 14, 2027, at 6:00 PM., with the plan to hold one evening meeting each quarter.

Transitional Living Center Review: Ms. Maneage conducted a complete review and audit of the TLC. Her findings showed that the program is very robust. A recommendation included the TLC collaborating with the Board to create data dashboards that can be shared with TLC stakeholders.

Quarter for a Cause Fundraiser: Reels Auto Sales is selling raffle tickets to win a quarter of a steer, donated by Reels Auto and Bri McCaskey. Proceeds will benefit Geauga County Veterans' food pantry, WomenSafe, and Geauga mobile crisis teams. The hope is to raise $10,000. Tickets are $20 each and can be purchased by calling or stopping by Reel's. To promote the raffle, Michelle Maneage participated in an interview with representatives of Reels Auto and Bri so that information could be shared about mental health and the local crisis teams; the interview was posted on Facebook. Michelle said it was fun to be interviewed by a ten-year-old who is smart, curious, and interested in mental health.

Geauga Parks District Employee Wellness Day: In partnership with Ravenwood Health, staff presented on managing stress and supporting others. Sixty employees attended the presentation and were thrilled to receive the Board's giveaways. The presentations by the Board on various topics were noted as an example of how the Board supports the community.

Geauga Family First Council: Director Lakomiak, who serves as Chair, reported that Geauga is one of three councils in the state that exceeded statewide goals and benchmarks regarding infant mortality rates, kindergarten readiness, and foster care entrance rates. The strong partnerships in Geauga County helped achieve these milestones.

Community Outreach: Members of the Suicide Prevention Coalition attended Wellness Night at a Chardon football game; Director Lakomiak attended a pet blessing at Celebration Lutheran Church and provided 988 doggie bag dispensers; Director Lakomiak participated in the NAMI Walk; Michelle Maneage participated in Reel's Auto panel on mental health.

Behavioral Health Community Kickball Game: Four teams participated this year. The Crisis Crushers beat the Sheriff's Office to win the tournament. The event was well attended and a lot of fun. Local agencies donated, so all participants and family members had access to a food truck.

VII. BOARD REVIEW AND ACTION ITEMS:

a. Resolution 26-10-1 FF2027 Bipartisan Safer Communities Act Behavioral Health Disaster Preparedness Projects Grant Award

Ms. Johnson moved to approve the Resolution. Mr. Holden seconded the motion. Discussion: Director Lakomiak reported that this is the third year the Board has received this grant. Some of these funds will be used to review and revise policies and procedures for the Geauga LOSS Team and will replace the Board's previous allocation for this purpose, as the grant stated, but the award was unknown at the time. **ROLL CALL VOTE: AYES-8; NAYS-0; ABSTENTIONS-0. MOTION APPROVED.**

b. Financial Reports

Mr. Mausser presented the financial reports for September and highlighted the following:

- 22.8% of the Board's SY2027 administrative budget has been expended through September.
- Geauga County Calendar Year Budget Performance Report shows expenditures of just over $5.76 million through September.
- The Auditor's Fund Balance at the end of September was just over $2.08 million.
- Voucher Recap 723 for September 2026 in the amount of $885,711.08.

VIII. OLD BUSINESS

There was no Old Business discussed.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

a. Policy and Procedures Discussion

As part of ongoing governance, the Ohio Department of Behavioral Health recommends reviewing policies every four years; best practice is to review them more often. As a result of the culture of quality and standard updates, minor changes will be made to some policies, but most will remain the same. A substantial review and update of all policies was conducted last year. Director Lakomiak asked whether the preference is for the Board to review any changes or for a Programs and Policies committee meeting to be held for this purpose. All policies will be noted as reviewed, even if no changes were recommended. It was decided that the Board will review policies that need to be changed; any such changes will be noted for ease of review.

b. Social Media/Marketing Overview

Director Lakomiak said the Board received funding to upgrade its website and establish the Suicide Prevention Coalition website. The Board has a Facebook page and other social media accounts. No funds have been specifically allocated for social media and marketing.
Director Lakomiak is in the process of obtaining quotes for social media content creation. Some quotes exceed the Board's needs; additional quotes were requested to address more specific services and other forms of advertising to reach people who do not use social media. No funding amount was

proposed at this meeting; the intention was only to open the discussion and get direction from Board members.

Chairman Oluic met with Director Lakomiak the previous week and discussed this topic. He said social media is a powerful platform. He suggested establishing a marketing and outreach line item, determining an allocation, transferring seed money, and revisiting this discussion once all the bids are received.

Chairman Oluic reiterated his support for a dedicated line item and noted the range of marketing and advertising options, citing Metzenbaum's annual postcard featuring a pie chart. Ms. Johnson suggested seed funding of $500 to $1,000. Mr. Holden asked whether partner agencies have anything similar in place. Director Lakomiak plans to contact partner agencies. If the Board approves funding, it could establish a marketing and social media line item or add funds to the existing system-wide education and outreach allocation.

Mr. Mausser said the community education line item might have funds available. He suggested including these costs there rather than under administration, as the purpose is to inform the public about available services. Ms. Johnson agreed that the expenses would fit within that line item and that seed funding might already be available. Mr. Mausser reported that $22,000 remains from the $70,000 allocation. He stated that boards may also use these funds to promote levies, although this Board has never used the line item for that purpose. Chairman Oluic noted that another funding mechanism exists for levy efforts. Mr. Mausser clarified that the political action committee account holds approximately $3,500.

c. Appointment of Nominating Committee

Chairman Oluic asked Mr. Lundblad, Ms. Dykes, and Ms. Varanese to serve on the Nominating Committee and to submit a proposed slate of officers for the remainder of SFY2027. This will be voted on at the November meeting. Nominations can also be made from the floor.

X. WOMENSAFE PRESENTATION

Liz Brant, Chief Clinical Officer, provided program updates and outcome information for SFY2026 on behalf of WomenSafe.

Mr. Lundblad noted that he has learned a lot from the agency presentations and now has a better understanding of each agency's role in the county, especially the roles of the Sheriff's Office and the Crisis Response Director.

XI. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Mary Wynne-Peaspanen sadly reported that Ann Mason, one of the founders of Signature Health, recently passed.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Holden moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Johnson seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 7:08 PM.