

**Maryland Pediatric Cancer Research Commission**  
Meeting 3 | June 23, 2025 | Time 3:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.  
Virtual Meeting

**MEETING MINUTES**

**Attendees:**

**Members Present**

Dana Christo  
Ruth Hoffman  
Dr. Kathryn Ruble  
Beth Siever  
Dr. Piotr Walczak  
Dr. Curt Civin  
Dr. Jeffrey Dome  
Dr. Aziza Shad  
Dr. Donald Small

**Members Absent**

Dr. John Shern  
Dr. Elizabeth Kromm

**Maryland Department of Health (MDH) Staff Present**

Jody Sheely  
Katherine Natafgi  
Dr. Ken Lin Tai  
Megan Sehr  
Pamela Williams  
Dr. Sadie Peters  
Tyra Hudgens

**Others Present**

Pansy Watson

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

Dr. Peters convened the meeting at 3:00pm and Katherine Natafgi called roll. Nine members were present. Staff from MDH and the Maryland State Ethics Commission introduced themselves. No members of the public were present. Dr. Peters then introduced co-chairs Ruth Hoffman and Curt Civin and Ruth Hoffman briefly reviewed the agenda and minutes from Meeting #2. There were no edits to the minutes. Curt Civin moved to approve the minutes. Piotr Walczak seconded it. The minutes were passed by a voice vote with no objections. The minutes from Meeting #2 will be posted on the Commission's webpage.

## **2. Grant Proposal Review Process**

### **a. Update on MDH Legal Counsel Advice**

Co-chair Curt Civin reviewed the advice received by the Commission regarding potential conflicts of interest which may arise during the process for receiving, evaluating, and awarding scientific grant proposals. There was discussion clarifying that the hybrid review approach previously discussed by the Commission, with the Commission members serving as primary reviewers with input from outside expertise as needed, may still lead to the perception of conflict of interest. Dr. Civin proposed that using an independent review organization would reduce the perception of conflicts of interest, reduce the administrative burden for the Commission, and allow the Commission to do secondary reviews and make final grant award decisions. The previously discussed hybrid approach would have restricted the number of Commission members who could be involved in the final review.

### **b. Decision about Outsourcing Reviews**

A number of factors must be considered when determining whether to outsource the RFA review process including timeline, cost, and availability of peer review organizations. Commission members inquired about what the cost of outsourcing to a peer review organization would be. MDH staff reported that their research showed that cost would vary based on the number of grants to be awarded and the number of applications received. A Commission member, noting that funding is limited, suggested that limits may need to be placed on the amount of funding awarded for applications. Citing the item later in the meeting agenda, the co-chairs briefly tabled this discussion.

After discussion of outsourcing the review of grant applications, the Commission moved to approve the outsourcing of the grant review process. Ruth Hoffman motioned for a vote to outsource the receipt and primary reviews to an independent peer review organization, Aziza Schad seconded. The Commission voted unanimously with no opposition.

## **3. Time-sensitive Items**

### **a. Procurement Process for Hiring Outside Review Experts or Organization**

The co-chairs presented the Commission with an overview of the timeline for the procurement process for hiring an outside review organization to evaluate RFAs. The plan is for the RFA to be developed, released, and reviewed between June and September 2025. Contracting is planned to take place from October to December 2025, with the contract to begin in January 2026.

### **b. Requests for Application (RFA) for Scientific Proposals**

#### I. Encumberment and size of grants

The Commission reviewed possible expenditures for grants and proposal review. The Commission discussed limiting individual grant awards to \$100,000 to \$200,000 annually with a total of 10 to 12 awards supported for each of two years. Aziza Shad moved to approve these limits, Donald Small seconded. The Commission voted in favor and there were no objections.

#### ii. Confirmation of essential elements

The Commission discussed that the RFA should probably contain some statement that the grantee should present at a symposium at some point in their project period. The Commission also discussed whether the eligible Maryland institutions should have a cap on the number of applications submitted and how that proportion might best be decided.

#### iii. RFA timeline (draft completion and release)

Dr. Civin proposed that the Commission would develop the RFA for scientific proposals during the fall of 2025 and have it ready for release in February of 2026.

### **4. General Updates**

#### **a. Eligibility for Washington DC institutions**

The Commission discussed the legislative intent for the Commission and how DC-based institutions fit into the intention of the law. The Commission decided to vote to limit eligibility for grants to only organizations located in Maryland.

Donald Small motioned to vote. Ruth Hoffman seconded. The Commission voted and there was no opposition or abstention.

#### **b. Vacant Commission seats**

The Commission discussed the two vacant positions on the Commission. Ms. Hoffman reported that she has been in touch with two prospective members who have submitted applications. Dr. Peters relayed that the MDH Office of Appointments is working with the Governor's Office of Appointments to follow up on the vacant positions for a survivor/ caregiver and another scientist.

### **5. Next Steps**

- The Commission will continue with a monthly meeting cadence starting in August. The Commission will not meet during the month of July.
- Dr. Peters from MDH will share presentation slides, statutes which govern the Pediatric Cancer Research Fund and the Commission, a draft of the RFA to solicit scientific proposals as well as Doodle polls to schedule monthly meetings with the Commission.

**6. Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**7. Adjournment**

Citing no more items on the agenda, Curt Civil requested a motion to adjourn the meeting. Donald Small moved to adjourn the meeting, Ruth Hoffman seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 4:18 PM