Maryland Pediatric Cancer Research Commission Minutes
Meeting #10 | June 15, 2026| 10:00 – 11:00am
Virtual Meeting
MEETING MINUTES

Attendees
Members in Attendance:
Michelle Urzynicok
Beth Siever
John Shern
Kathryn Ruble
Curt Civin
Brigitte Widemann
Aziza Shad
Donald Small
Ruth Hoffman

Members Absent:
Elizabeth Kromm
Dana Christo
Piotr Walczak
Jeffrey Dome

Commission Staff:
Sadie Peters
Kate Natafgi

Additional Attendees:
Pansy Watson

1. **Welcome, Agenda Review, and Roll Call**
    a. The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Co-chair Ruth Hoffman who provided an overview of the agenda.
    b. Roll call was conducted. Eight members were present, representing a quorum.
    c. Minutes from Meeting #9 were reviewed. Aziza Shad moved to approve the minutes from meeting #9 and the Ad-hoc meeting in February 2026. Jack Shern seconded the motion and the minutes for both meetings were approved unanimously.

2. **Updates on Legislation and Regulations**
    a. Ruth Hoffman provided the legislative update, announcing the successful passage of House Bill 672, Maryland Pediatric Cancer Fund – Entities Eligible for Grants, which was signed into law by Governor Moore on April 28, 2026. The bill, sponsored by Delegate

Shetty, unanimously passed both chambers of the General Assembly and was amended to take effect as emergency legislation, allowing for faster implementation. The legislation revised eligibility requirements for Pediatric Cancer Fund grants, limiting recipients to nonprofit hospitals, educational institutions, and other nonprofit organizations conducting pediatric cancer research. Ms. Hoffman explained that this change streamlines the grant-making process by allowing the Commission to use Requests for Applications (RFAs) rather than Requests for Proposals (RFPs), avoiding additional approval requirements and significantly shortening implementation timelines. She also noted that a childhood cancer survivor attended the bill signing ceremony and was recognized by Governor Moore for their advocacy efforts.

b. Commission members also discussed legislation to increase taxes on vaping products to support pediatric cancer research. The Commission had submitted a Letter of Support for this legislation. Dr. Civin reported that while the proposal received strong support and favorable testimony during the 2026 legislative session, it did not advance because of the Governor's commitment to avoiding new taxes during the current fiscal year. Legislators indicated interest in revisiting the proposal during the next session. Dr. Civin noted that projections suggest the tax could generate more than $5 million annually for pediatric cancer research while also discouraging youth vaping. Ms. Hoffman highlighted a recently enacted Iowa law that directs vaping tax revenue to childhood cancer research and suggested reviewing that model as the Commission prepares for future legislative efforts.

c. The Commission then received an update from MDH on draft regulations for the Pediatric Cancer Research Fund. Sadie Peters reported that the regulations are advancing through Departmental review and outlined the remaining steps in the regulatory process, including review by the Governor's Office, publication in the Maryland Register for public comment, and final promulgation, which is anticipated by mid-November. She encouraged Commission members to submit any remaining informal comments on the draft regulations, a request that had been issued to each individually by email a week earlier.

3. **Peer Review Organization (PRO) Request for Proposals**
   a. The Commission received an update from MDH on the procurement process for a PRO that will manage the scientific review of grant applications. Dr. Peters reported that the PRO RFP had been posted the previous week and would remain open for five weeks. Proposals will be reviewed following the submission period, with a selected organization expected to be notified by the end of August. Contracting is anticipated to occur in the fall, with a contract start date of November 1, 2026. Dr. Peters noted that establishing the PRO contract before releasing the scientific grant RFA is a key milestone in the implementation timeline.

   b. Commission members asked how potential PRO applicants would know of the RFP. Dr. Peters explained that MDH developed and submitted a direct solicitation list to

procurement staff, identifying approximately seven organizations with experience conducting scientific grant reviews. The list included both nonprofit and for-profit entities, as the PRO procurement is being conducted through an RFP process that permits applications from either type of organization. Thus, organizations with experience supporting grant review processes in Maryland and other states, including those recommended by New Jersey's pediatric cancer research program, were contacted by the procurement staff to encourage application.

c. Dr. Peters also informed the Commission that MDH had modified the proposed scope of work for the PRO in order to align with budgetary and procurement constraints. The Commission had previously allocated approximately $50,000 for PRO services over one grant cycle; however, MDH determined that this funding would need to support a contract spanning roughly three years, beginning before the release of the scientific grant RFA and, because final project reviews are needed, extending beyond the completion of the initial two-year grant cycle. As the number of months under which the PRO would be under contract seemed onerous, the PRO's responsibilities were narrowed to focus primarily on the initial scientific review of grant applications. Interim and final progress reviews, which the Commission had already discussed possibly taking on, would instead be conducted by Commission members. Commission members expressed support for this approach, noting that it would help maintain Commission engagement in the grant oversight process while remaining within existing budget limitations. Dr. Civin also noted that the structure could be revisited in future years if additional funding becomes available, such as through the proposed vaping tax legislation. Additionally, Dr. Peters reminded the group that increasing the PRO contract above $50,000 would trigger a more complex state procurement process, making the current approach the most practical option for the program's initial funding cycle.

4. **Scientific Grant RFA**
   a. The Commission reviewed a tentative timeline for the release and implementation of the Pediatric Cancer Research Fund Scientific Grant RFA. Dr. Peters reported that, assuming the regulations are promulgated as expected, the RFA could be released in mid-November 2026, with applications due in January 2027. Under the proposed schedule, the PRO would complete application evaluations and scoring in early 2027, allowing the Commission and MDH to make award decisions and execute grant agreements with the goal of beginning funded projects in spring 2027.

   b. Commission members discussed whether the proposed timeline was overly ambitious. Dr. Brigitte Widemann expressed concern that the period between award decisions and grant start dates might be too short based on her experience with other grant programs. Dr. Civin and Dr. Small also noted that the proposed application period would coincide with the holiday season and might not provide applicants sufficient time to prepare high-quality submissions. Dr. Small further questioned whether the PRO would have adequate time to recruit reviewers and complete evaluations within the proposed review period. Dr. Peters acknowledged these concerns and agreed that the timeline

would likely need to be adjusted as implementation progresses, emphasizing that the schedule was intended as an initial planning framework.

c. Ruth Hoffman highlighted the importance of demonstrating measurable progress before the 2027 legislative session. She explained that legislators had expressed concern during committee hearings that funds appropriated for pediatric cancer research had not yet been awarded despite the program being authorized several years earlier. Ms. Hoffman noted that maintaining momentum and showing evidence that grant funding is moving toward award would strengthen the Commission's position when seeking additional resources, including support for future vaping tax legislation. Dr. Civin agreed that while some timeline adjustments might be necessary, having the RFA released and applications under review during the legislative session could still demonstrate significant progress to lawmakers.

d. The Commission also discussed outreach and communication regarding the future grant opportunity. Dr. Peters explained that MDH and Commission members must avoid providing advance notice of specific application dates or opportunities to select institutions or individuals before the RFA is publicly released, as doing so could create fairness concerns and undermine the competitive procurement process. Once the RFA is officially posted, however, MDH will distribute the opportunity broadly through a direct solicitation list and other public channels to ensure that eligible organizations are aware of the funding opportunity.

e. Dr. Peters then reviewed revisions to the draft Scientific Grant RFA that were necessitated by the recent statutory and regulatory changes restricting eligibility to nonprofit organizations. The Commission discussed updated definitions of "applicant" and "investigator," clarifying that applications must be submitted by eligible nonprofit organizations while individual principal investigators may represent a wide range of disciplines, including psychosocial and survivorship research. Commission members also revisited the provision limiting the number of applications submitted by a single institution and agreed that the language should be revised for consistency by referencing the defined term "applicant." Dr. Peters noted that additional revisions to the RFA would be necessary to align terminology throughout the document and indicated that a revised draft would be circulated for review before the next Commission meeting.

f. To facilitate that review, commissioners discussed reconvening the Scientific Grant RFA Subcommittee prior to the next full Commission meeting. Members agreed that the subcommittee could review the revised draft, address outstanding questions, and provide recommendations before presenting the document to the full Commission for further discussion and approval.

5. **Next Steps and New Member Recruitment**

a. The Commission discussed scheduling for upcoming meetings and agreed that a full Commission meeting in July would not be necessary. Instead, members supported holding the next full Commission meeting in August, with the Scientific Grant RFA Subcommittee meeting beforehand to continue work on the grant application materials. Dr. Peters indicated that a revised draft of the Scientific Grant RFA would be circulated prior to those meetings to facilitate review and discussion.

b. Commission members also discussed concerns about maintaining membership and quorum requirements as several terms are scheduled to expire in October 2026. Ms. Hoffman emphasized the importance of identifying and recruiting potential new members to ensure the Commission can continue conducting business without interruption. Commissioners discussed potential candidates from organizations such as the U.S. Department of Defense, the FDA, NIH, and other institutions, and members were encouraged to submit recommendations for consideration. Dr. Civin noted that future conflict-of-interest requirements could further affect membership, as Commission members affiliated with institutions receiving grant awards may need to step down and later seek reappointment after disclosing conflicts.

c. The discussion also highlighted the importance of maintaining the membership categories required by statute, including pediatric cancer survivors or parent representatives, researchers, nurses, and physicians with expertise in pediatric cancer care and research. Commissioners acknowledged that replacing departing members will require careful consideration to ensure both compliance with statutory requirements and continued representation of diverse perspectives across clinical, translational, and laboratory-based pediatric cancer research. Ms. Hoffman encouraged members submitting recommendations to identify the statutory membership category for which each nominee would be eligible.

d. To support succession planning, Dr. Peters requested that Commission members provide copies of their most recent appointment letters or otherwise confirm their current term expiration dates, noting that several members had received revised appointment letters from the Governor's Office of Appointments. Dr. Peters agreed to send follow-up emails to all Commission members requesting updated term information and nominations for prospective members. Commission members also discussed the importance of providing recommendations for future Commission membership.

6. **Public Comment**
   No public comments

7. **Adjournment**
   Donald Small moved that the meeting be adjourned. Aziza Shad seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 10:48 am.