Maryland Pediatric Cancer Research Commission Minutes
Meeting #11 | August 10, 2026| 2:00 – 3:00pm
Virtual Meeting

MEETING MINUTES

Attendees
Members in Attendance:
Michelle Urzynicok
John Shern
Curt Civin
Brigitte Widemann
Donald Small
Piotr Walczak
Ruth Hoffman

Members Absent:
Beth Siever
Elizabeth Kromm
Dana Christo
Jeffrey Dome
Kathryn Ruble
Aziza Shad

Commission Staff:
Sadie Peters
Kate Natafgi

Additional Attendees:
Pansy Watson
Jody Sheely
Pamela Williams
Tyra Hudgens
Victoria Marte-Tiburcio

1. **Welcome, Agenda Review, and Roll Call**
    a. The meeting was called to order at 2:05 p.m. by Co-chair Curt Civin who provided an overview of the agenda.
    b. Roll was called, and six Commission members were present, which was one member short of the required quorum. The Commission proceeded with informational agenda items but did not take any formal votes. Approval of the previous meeting's minutes was therefore tabled until a quorum could be established.
2. **Update on Regulations**

a. Sadie Peters from MDH provided an update on the Commission's proposed regulations. The regulations have completed draft development and internal review, received the Governor's approval, and were submitted to the Division of State Documents. The next step is publication for a 30-day public comment period, followed by review of comments and any necessary revisions before final publication. Dr. Peters noted that additional administrative steps remain in the process.

3. Update on Peer Review Organization (PRO) Solicitation

a. Dr. Peters reported that the solicitation for an organization to conduct the Commission's scientific peer review process was released June 8, with proposals due July 13. The evaluation panel is currently reviewing the submitted proposals. Due to the confidentiality of the procurement process, details regarding the number of proposals received could not be shared. The Commission was advised that there remains sufficient time to complete the selection process.

4. Legislative Funding Discussion

a. Dr. Curt Civin discussed plans to seek legislation during the upcoming legislative session to establish an ongoing funding mechanism for the Commission, potentially through an increase in the tax on vaping products. He noted that the proposed approach could provide a sustainable source of funding for future pediatric cancer research awards while the Commission continues to utilize the approximately $5 million currently available for grants.
b. Ruth Hoffman reported that she had prepared a comparison of the Maryland and Iowa approaches to legislation that could provide additional funding for pediatric cancer research and offered to distribute the information for Commission discussion.
c. Members expressed interest in reviewing the comparison and considering potential refinements for future legislative efforts.

5. Scientific Grant RFA

a. The Commission discussed the draft Research Funding Announcement (RFA) and identified several technical aspects of the application process that should be clarified for applicants. These included distinguishing the applicant organization from the contact/project investigator, clarifying submission responsibilities, and ensuring that the research narrative and budget are submitted as separate documents. Sadie Peters agreed that these details should be addressed in coordination with MDH procurement staff to minimize confusion for applicants.

b. The anticipated timeline for the RFA was also discussed. Following finalization of the regulations, the plan is to release the RFA, allow several weeks for applications, conduct peer review over approximately 45 days, have the Commission review the results and make funding decisions, and proceed through contracting with the goal of beginning grants in April. The Commission may need to adjust the timeline depending on the time needed for applicants to prepare submissions and for the State contracting process.

c. The Commission reviewed the draft Request for Applications (RFA) and discussed areas where additional clarification may be needed, particularly regarding application submission procedures.
d. The Commission discussed the process for organizations submitting multiple applications, including the requirement for a separate SUP number and contact PI for each application. Members emphasized that the RFA should clearly explain that an organization may submit up to nine applications, with each application submitted as a separate two-part document and assigned a distinct SUP number.

e. Members were encouraged to review the RFA from the perspective of an applicant/contact PI and identify language that could be confusing or contradictory. Sadie emphasized that clear instructions are important to ensure applicants and reviewers can easily understand the requirements.

f. Dr. Peters clarified that certain provisions allowing MDH to cancel the RFA reflect state requirements and are included because the RFA is issued by MDH.

6. Evaluation Criteria and Reviewer Rubric

a. The Commission discussed the need to finalize the evaluation criteria and reviewer rubric that will guide the external review of applications.
b. The criteria are largely reflected in the RFA but need to be formalized into a separate rubric for reviewers.
c. The Commission agreed that the existing RFA subcommittee could continue this work. Mrs. Natafgi will circulate a scheduling poll for two potential one-hour subcommittee meetings.

7. Finalization of Recusal Procedures

a. The Commission reviewed the proposed recusal procedures for the grant review process.
b. Members discussed circumstances requiring recusal, including when a member, the member's institution, or an individual from the member's institution has submitted an application. The Commission agreed that members serving as contact PIs, MPIs, or co-investigators on an application should recuse themselves from consideration of that application.
c. Members identified the need to revise terminology throughout the document to consistently use "co-investigator" rather than "co-PI" where appropriate.
d. The Commission discussed institutional conflicts and the potential impact on the number of members available to participate in secondary review and voting. MDH staff described a process for collecting conflicts in advance, reviewing the list of recommended applications, and identifying members with the fewest conflicts who could participate in the discussion and vote.
e. Members who are required to recuse will be placed in a virtual waiting room during discussion and voting on the affected application and returned to the meeting afterward.

f. The Commission clarified that its secondary review will occur after the external reviewer has ranked the applications and will focus on confirming that review standards were met, considering geographic and institutional balance, and resolving close rankings rather than re-evaluating the scientific merits of individual applications.
g. The Commission also discussed post-award conflicts. Members who receive an award, or whose institution receives an award, will have a conflict requiring resignation from the Commission under applicable state ethics requirements. Members may subsequently reapply for appointment, but reappointment is determined by the Governor's Appointments Office.
h. The Commission discussed the possibility of inviting individuals with relevant expertise to participate as non-voting consultants or members of the public during specific discussions, particularly to provide subject-matter input while avoiding additional conflicts of interest.

8. Commission Membership and Expiring Terms

a. The Commission reviewed member terms and noted that four members have terms expiring in September 2026, creating an immediate need to identify and recruit potential replacements or reapplicants.
b. Members whose terms are expiring were encouraged to begin the reappointment process. Dr. Peters will consult with the MDH Office of Appointments regarding the reapplication process and whether members may continue serving while awaiting replacement.
c. Commission members were encouraged to identify potential candidates, particularly individuals without institutional conflicts related to potential grant awards.
d. Commission staff will obtain the appropriate reapplication link and information from the MDH Office of Appointments and distribute it to Commission members by the end of the week.
e. Brigitte Widemann and Jack Shern offered to discuss potential candidates from NIH.
f. Members discussed the need to prioritize filling vacant appointments and nominations. Dr. Civin suggested establishing a membership subcommittee to consolidate membership recommendations, facilitate the approval process, and actively recruit potential members. The Commission noted that the next full Commission meeting is currently scheduled for October 12, but discussed whether an earlier meeting during the week of August 31 may be warranted given the urgency of the membership appointments.
g. Staff will coordinate scheduling of a membership subcommittee meeting and a full Commission meeting during the week of August 31, as appropriate. Staff will also send a scheduling poll for the Scientific RFA subcommittee

9. Public Comment

No public comments

10. Adjournment

Dr. Civin moved that the meeting be adjourned. John Shern seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 3:14 pm.