



**GOVERNOR'S
COMMISSION ON
SUICIDE PREVENTION**

MARYLAND

Governor's Commission on Suicide Prevention Meeting
March 16, 2022 1:00pm-3:00pm

Commission Members on Zoom

Robert Anderson	Department of Juvenile Services
Donna Barnes	National Organization for People of Color Against Suicide
Ed Bartlinski	Police, Local Corrections, or Fire and Rescue
Lynda Bonieskie	Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (Represented by Timony Vail)
Dana Burl	Department of Veterans Affairs
Jada Carrington	Representative of Young Adults
Amanda Celentano	Department of Aging
Johanna Dolan	Substance Use Recovery Community
Senator Adelaide Eckardt	Member of the Maryland Senate (Represented by Taylor Blades)
Monica Guerrero Vazquez	Hispanic/Latino Community
William Jernigan	Children & Youth Division, Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services
Kevin Johnson	Faith Community
Dorothy Kaplan	Suicide Prevention Group
Julie Matheny	Family Member
Georgette Lavetsky	Deputy Secretary Public Health
Cynthia Macri	Asian American/Pacific Islander Community
Henry Meiser	High School Representative
Lynne Muller	Maryland State Department of Education
Kirsten Robb-McGrath	Department of Disabilities
Susan Schwarten	Survivor of a Suicide Attempt
Haley Taylor	Maryland Addictions Directors Council
Andrea Walker	Maryland Health Officers
Kristin Washington	Representative of Active/Former Armed Forces Member
Holly Wilcox (Vice-Chair)	Academic Community
Eileen Zeller (Chair)	Mental Health Association of Maryland



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Maryland Department of Health Staff

Alex Walker	Behavioral Health Administration
Phillip Thompkins	Behavioral Health Administration

Behavioral Health Administration

Laura Burns- Heffner	Behavioral Health Administration
Barry Page	Behavioral Health Administration
Mary Viggiani	Behavioral Health Administration
Kathy Rebbert-Franklin	Behavioral Health Administration

Welcome

Eileen Zeller welcomed all attendees to the Commission meeting. Eileen outlined the agenda for the meeting. All commissioners introduced themselves.

Approval of January 19, 2021 Minutes

The January 19, 2021, meeting minutes were approved with a revision: Julie Matheny's name will be added to the final minutes as an attendee.

Chair Remarks

Eileen Zeller gave her remarks. On Feb 29th, Eileen conducted a new commissioner orientation. Eileen offered the opportunity to repeat the orientation for any interested commission member.

Eileen has met with each commissioner individually and thanked them for their time and expertise. Eileen found a strong overlap in the intersectionality of identities, occupations, passions, and lived experience between commissioners. Eileen expressed gratitude for each representative on the commission.

Eileen discussed the new commission structure. Most commission work will be completed through standing and ad hoc committees. Most of the committees will be based on the State Plan priorities. The State Suicide Prevention Plan and the Postvention Task Force will determine the timeline for the commission priorities. The commission will create a permanent structure in December when the State Plan is submitted.



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There are other bills that the commission may want to support during future legislative sessions. During the May meeting, the commission will discuss developing a Legislative Affairs Committee to determine the extent to which the commission wants to be involved with legislation, the criteria and process for proposing or supporting legislation, and how legislation will be monitored.

BHA Update

Barry Page, the program manager of Early Intervention and Wellness gave the Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) and the Office of Suicide Prevention's (OSP) updates.

Phillip Thompkin is the newest member of the Office of Suicide Prevention and the Commission staff. Phill is the current Mental Health Promotion Coordinator and will begin the Health Policy Analyst I position at the end of the month. The new Director for suicide prevention, Dionne Bowie, will be starting on March 23rd. Theresa Burns will start on March 30th as the Mental Health Promotion Coordinator. The office is still in the process of re-staffing and appreciates your patience. Alex Walker is leaving her position at BHA. The Commission thanked Alex for her contributions to the commission.

Barry updated the commission on the Garrett Lee Smith (GLS) grant status. After much careful thought and deliberation, BHA has made the decision not to pursue the SAMHSA GLS Youth Suicide Prevention grant. Although BHA believes that it is not the right time for Maryland to apply for this grant, they do believe that they can work toward expanding their interdepartmental work with significant local and stakeholder input. The system level work could proceed, enabling changes in these systems and ensuring we are well-poised to apply for a GLS during the next cycle. Eileen gave her full support to the BHA decision.

Due to the computer hack in December, there are severe limitations to accessing suicide prevention data. The data dashboard is still not accessible. BHA will provide updates, as this issue continues.

BHA is working on implementation for the July launch of 988, the three-digit national dialing code for people in behavioral health crisis. 988 will route callers to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. The Lifeline's current number (800-273-8255) will remain available even after 988 launches. Some funding opportunities are becoming available that will support the state's efforts to implement this change.



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Language Matters in Suicide Prevention- Presentation

Dr. Donna Holland Barnes presented on appropriate and de-stigmatizing language to use when speaking about suicide and suicide prevention.

Changing the Language

- *Survivors of suicide loss have strongly emphasized the challenges of stigmatized and biased language. Those who lost loved ones to suicide and those in the field of suicide prevention and trauma-informed care, agree on the following:*
 - *Unacceptable Terms:*
 - *committed suicide*
 - *successful attempt*
 - *unsuccessful attempt*
 - *failed attempt*
 - *Acceptable Terms:*
 - *took their own life*
 - *died by suicide*
 - *ended their life*
 - *attempted suicide*

Dr. Barnes outlined best practices and recommendations for media reporting on suicide (ReportingOnSuicide.org), which are based on international research. She noted that the way media covers suicide can influence behavior negatively by contributing to contagion, or positively by emphasizing help-seeking. The group thanked Dr. Barnes for her presentation and for sharing her lived experience.

Robert Anderson informed commissioners that support groups are available for suicide loss survivors and to contact Shannon Donnick at the American Foundation on Suicide Prevention (AFSP), sdonnick@afsp.org for more information. AFSP lists support groups and other resources at <https://afsp.org/find-a-support-group>. They also provide training for support group facilitators, including how to recognize complicated grief.

Holly informed the group that a recent study found that in the year it was released, [Logic's song 1-800-273-8255](#) (National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number) was associated with a significant rise in calls to the Lifeline, and may have resulted in 245 fewer deaths than what was expected nationally.



**GOVERNOR'S
COMMISSION ON
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MARYLAND

Anyone who is interested in continuing the conversation on postvention should join the Postvention Task Force Meeting on March 28th, at 9:00 a.m.

Eileen reminded commissioners that sensationalized press can add to suicide contagion, while stories of hope and recovery increase help-seeking.

Commission Priorities and Updates

Eileen proposed the 2022 Priorities of the commission

1. Postvention Plan
2. State Suicide Prevention Plan

Postvention Task Force Pre-planning Report

Dr. Kaplan presented on the Postvention Task Force plan and priorities. She welcomed the task force members and welcomed any new potential task force members. Dr. Wilcox is co-chairing this task force. The first meeting is March 28th. Any interested commissioners should email Alex Walker (alexandria.walker@maryland.gov) for an invitation.

Dr. Kaplan defined postvention:

- An organized response in the aftermath of a suicide to accomplish any one or more of the following:
 - To facilitate the healing of individuals from the grief and distress of suicide loss
 - To mitigate other negative effects of exposure to suicide
 - To prevent suicide among people who are at high risk after exposure to suicide
- Reference: Survivors of Suicide Loss Task Force US National Guidelines, National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention; Suicide Prevention Resource Center

Susan Schwarten asked how the task force would work to include suicide attempt survivors into the task force definition and goals. Dorothy stated that the proposed definition is the one generally accepted in the field, but that the task force will discuss how to fully include marginalized communities, including attempt survivors, at its March 28 meeting. The postvention plan will be integrated into the overall State Plan.

Holly mentioned that HB 699, sponsored by Delegate Mary Lehman (District 21), is notable legislation for postvention. This House bill would use opioid restitution funds to embed within the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner bereavement services for family members who lose



loved ones to suicide and opioid overdose. It may not pass this year but looks as if there could be some piloting of this model. A new grant proposal has just been submitted to help build out this approach.

State Suicide Prevention Plan

Eileen discussed the State Suicide Prevention Plan. The commission will develop a 2-year comprehensive, coordinated, strategic plan for suicide prevention, intervention, and post-suicide services across the State. (Due December 1, 2022) As directed by Executive Order 01.01.2018.26.

Eileen stressed a need for balance between comprehensive and practical approaches to suicide prevention that will:

- Make an impact
- Ensure our work is based in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)
- Coordinate with state groups (e.g., Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and their Families; Behavioral Health Advisory Council)
- Coordinate with regional and local jurisdictions and stakeholders (e.g., Maryland Association of Behavioral Health Authorities)
- Establish priorities
- Measure progress, collect baseline data and environmental scans

Initial Planning Group for the State Suicide Prevention Plan

- This group will meet once or twice to establish process and structure for the plan and to agree on a format. Volunteers will agree to take on leadership roles and/or be active on ad hoc committees.
- Andrea Walker is a co-chair for this group.

Eileen invited other commissioners to volunteer for this committee. A number of individuals volunteered.

Suicide Fatality Review Committee (SB94 and HB48) Update

Senator Eckardt's representative, Taylor Blades, Chief of Staff, introduced herself and briefed the commission on the Suicide Fatality Review Committee legislation, ([Senate Bill 94](#) and [House Bill 48](#)). SB94 passed through the Senate unanimously. The only amendment was adding 12



sponsors. The House sponsor (Delegate Belcastro) was also successful in getting HB48 passed on the House side. Senator Eckardt is optimistic that the bill will pass.

SB94 and HB48 propose establishing a suicide fatality review committee to identify and address factors contributing to suicide, and then to facilitate system changes in the state to prevent them.

Taylor also briefed the commission on [SB 944](#). Legislators are waiting to get a committee hearing scheduled for SB 994 (Mental Health Advanced Directives) that requires MDH to develop and implement a public awareness campaign that encourages the use of legislation to establish and maintain a centralized database of all mental health advanced directives.

Taylor explained an “advance directive”. Mental health advanced directives are documents that outline one’s care and treatment preferences for when one is having a mental health crisis. Commissioners can email Taylor Blades (Adelaide.Eckardt@senate.state.md.us) with questions.

Open Discussion

Lynne Muller will be retiring in May from MSDE and will not be renewing her commission appointment but will provide a representative for her seat for the Maryland State Department of Education.

Andrea Walker told the group that there are several local jurisdictions that are launching suicide prevention coalitions.

Robert Anderson reminded the commissioners of how important it is to develop the State Plan with a DEI lens.

Holly Wilcox mentioned the American Academy of Pediatrics released the blueprint for Youth Suicide Prevention (<https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/blueprint-for-youth-suicide-prevention/>). This could be a useful resource for the State Plan.

Action Steps

- Barry Page will provide a representative for the next meeting to brief the commission on 988



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- Alex will send the Language Matters Presentation to the commissioners.
- Alex will send a meeting invitation to any interested new Postvention Task Force members. The first meeting is March 28th at 9:00 a.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:55 pm.

The next Commission meeting will be held on May 16, 2022 from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm.