



Legislative and External Affairs Advisory Committee Meeting Summary
Date: December 15, 2025 | Time: 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

BHSOAC
1812 9th Street
Sacramento, California 95811

Advisory Committee Members:

Commission Staff:

Commissioner Robert Callan, Jr., Vice Chair Commissioner Amy Fairweather* Commissioner Tumboura Hill* Commissioner Karen Larsen Commissioner Jay'Riah Thomas-Beckett	Brenda Grealish Krsangi Knickerbocker Riann Kopchak Lester Robancho Cody Scott Kendra Zoller
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*Participated remotely.

Advisory Committee Members absent: Commissioners Mark Bontrager (Advisory Committee Chair), Gladys Mitchell, and Marvin Southard.

Agenda Item 1: Call to Order and Roll Call – Information

Commissioner Robert Callan, Jr., Advisory Committee Vice Chair, called the California Behavioral Health Commission (CBH or Commission) Legislative and External Affairs Advisory Committee (LEX Committee) meeting to order at approximately 1:00 p.m., welcomed everyone to the third LEX Committee meeting, and reviewed the meeting agenda.

Krsangi Knickerbocker, Deputy Chief Counsel, called the roll and confirmed the presence of a quorum.

Agenda Item 2: Announcements and Updates – Information

Vice Chair Callan gave the announcements as follows:

- The Advisory Committee will abide by Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act requirements; additionally, as part of the Commission's commitment to deeper public involvement and open governance, all Advisory Committee meetings include an enhanced public comment segment designed to promote genuine dialogue between the Committee and the community.

Contracts and Amendments

- In line with the new transparency efforts, the Commission will continue to provide brief updates on recent contracts and amendments approved under the Executive Director's authority. These updates are shared during all Committee announcements for informational purposes only. Please note that all contracts and amendments are negotiated between the Commission and the contractor and must be mutually agreed upon.

There are six contracts and amendments to report this month:

- An agreement in the amount of \$50,580 with the California Military Department has been approved to conduct an independent security assessment for IT security, as required by Government Code Section 11549.3.
- An agreement in the amount of \$48,677 with S&P Technology Solutions has been approved to acquire and deploy Cornerstone, a learning management software platform that will support training for both Commissioners and Commission staff.
- An agreement in the amount of \$65,000 with One Mind at Work has been approved to plan, conduct, and report on a statewide convening of leaders from across California. The goal of this convening is to shape a comprehensive program focused on supporting workforce mental health.
 - The effort builds on work initiated under a previous contract written in 2023, which concluded before the project was completed. The Commission is authorized under the Welfare and Institutions Code Section 5845(f)(14) to establish a framework and voluntary standards for mental health in the workplace. These standards aim to reduce stigma and increase awareness among public employees and employers about recovery goals of the BHSA.

Mara Madrigal-Weiss, PAC Committee Vice Chair, added that this is part of the Commission's commitment to lift up Voluntary Workplace Standards.

- An agreement in the amount of \$25,000 with the California School-Based Health Alliance has been approved to fund scholarships for the 2026 Annual School Health and Behavioral Health Conference.
- An agreement in the amount of \$175,000 with University of California, San Francisco, has been approved as part of an Interagency Agreement to support Full-Service Partnership evaluation work.
- An agreement in the amount of \$96,250 with Leading Resources, Inc., has been approved to facilitate an update to the Commission's strategic plan.

2026 Legislative Session

- The 2026 legislative session begins on January 5, 2026. The legislator's tentative legislative calendar and deadlines for next year are included in the packet.

Upcoming Meetings

- The next full Commission meeting will be a two-day meeting to be held in Sacramento on January 22-23, 2026.
- The next LEX Committee meeting date will soon be announced.

For more information on any of these items, please visit the website or sign up for the email distribution list.

Agenda Item 3: General Public Comment – Information

Laurel Benhamida, Ph.D., (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Good afternoon. I'm Laurel Benhamida with Muslim American Society – Social Services Foundation and REMHDCO. I understand that the Commission is going through a new process, many new processes, and one of them is the enhanced public comment. So, and I really appreciate that that was a sort of a promise given to stakeholders when no members of the public were included on Committees as they had been in the past. But a promise is a promise and our last meeting this morning didn't fulfill that promise.

The Commission was tied on time. Public comment was reduced from three minutes to two minutes, and there was no discussion after one important item – the one on the Innovation Partnership Fund. So, my suggestion is that you add 15 or 30 minutes to meetings so that you can fulfill your promise to stakeholders and at least two to three minutes for public comment. And, after an initial public comment, if you really want to have interaction, it needs to be more flexible. And, for us stakeholders, we need to make our comments concise, clear, and have impact so that we can incentivize and encourage and inspire the Commissioners to respond. So, thank you very much.

Stacie Hiramoto (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Good morning. Stacie Hiramoto with REMHDCO, the Racial and Ethnic Mental Health Disparities Coalition. Welcome. I want to really echo and support the comments of Laurel Benhamida. Again, we really do appreciate the Commission trying its best to get public comment, but there was very little dialogue, so to speak, and certainly the public really wasn't able to express itself very well at the last meeting because of lack of time.

The other thing – so, if we could think of things in the future, I think still having a public member that can express the things so you won't have as much public comment because their wishes will be expressed by people on the Committee.

The other thing is I just wanted to have the Commission remember that, for communities of color, they consider people – they may have different definitions of Prop 1 as far as who are the priority populations and who has the most serious need. Anyway, thank you. I want to be brief so I will stop. Thank you.

Carli Stelzer (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Hello. Good afternoon. Carli Stelzer with the California Behavioral Health Association. I want to uplift the comments made by Laurel and Stacie from REMHDCO. So far, we also want to express our appreciation to

the new process that the Commission is working through and the ability for the public to participate in these ways in the Committee and particularly in shaping the legislative priorities for 2026.

We know we'll talk more about it in the later sections of this legislation, but want to echo comments made about the need for there to be more robust stakeholder engagement and a back-and-forth communication process that would allow behavioral health providers to have a seat at some of these conversations.

I look forward to more public comment later in the meeting. Thank you so much.

Agenda Item 4: Meeting Minutes – Action

Vice Chair Callan stated the September 18, 2025, LEX Committee Meeting Minutes will be reviewed for approval.

There were no questions from Committee Members and no public comment.

Action: Vice Chair Callan asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Commissioner Larsen made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Thomas-Beckett, that:

- *The Legislative and External Affairs Advisory Committee approves the September 18, 2025, Meeting Minutes as presented.*

Motion passed 5 yes, 0 no, and 0 abstain, per roll call vote as follows:

The following LEX Committee Members voted “Yes”: Commissioners Fairweather, Hill, Larsen, and Thomas-Beckett, and Vice Chair Callan.

Agenda Item 5: Legislation – Action

Vice Chair Callan stated the Committee will consider potential bill proposals for Commission sponsorship in the 2026 legislative session. He asked presenters to give their presentations.

Kendra Zoller, Deputy Director, Legislative and External Affairs, provided an overview, with a slide presentation, of the proposal, staff analysis and its alignment with the CBH Decision-Making Framework, recommended course of action, and next steps for Commission consideration and formal action. She stated Commissioner Mara Madrigal-Weiss submitted the bill proposal for the 2026 legislative session aimed at addressing a statewide need titled, “Sustaining and Supporting Suicide Prevention in Schools,” in response to the need to expand comprehensive evidence-based efforts across the state. The proposal will develop free online suicide prevention training for students, teachers, parents, and caregivers, and will create a statewide system to collect and analyze school suicide risk screening data.

Mara Madrigal-Weiss, CBH Commissioner and Executive Director, Student Wellness and School Culture, San Diego County Office of Education, and Heather Nemour, Coordinator, Student Wellness and School Culture, San Diego County Office of Education, continued the slide presentation and reviewed San Diego County’s LivingWorks Start training and other suicide prevention strategies, including the San

Diego County Office of Education's Creating Opportunities in Preventing and Eliminating Suicide (COPES) Initiative. This approach guarantees that school-based efforts are both measurable and impactful.

Committee Discussion

Commissioner Larsen suggested that other systems should support this work along with the BHSSA funding. She suggested overlapping the priority populations and the risk for overdose and suicides. She suggested identifying child welfare involved youth, juvenile justice youth, and homeless youth in the demographics being collected. System involved youth are sometimes the most at risk for suicide or overdose.

Commissioner Cross agreed and thanked the Commission for focusing on this issue.

Commissioner Fairweather agreed with Commissioner Larson's additions to the demographic data and suggested that questions about drug use and housing stability might be answered in the substance of the screening.

Vice Chair Callan asked if the training for suicide risk addresses underlying issues such as substance use disorder. He asked if students are sent to the proper areas to deal with any underlying issues.

Commissioner Madrigal-Weiss stated the proposal is for suicide prevention online training to recognize at-risk behavior and warning signs. This is a good training but it did not have access to parents and caregivers. It is important to create something that is accessible to all individuals in the lives of the students. The beauty of this proposal is that the parameters can be set up to include things such as addressing underlying issues.

Vice Chair Callan asked about the follow-up process after meeting with them.

Commissioner Madrigal-Weiss stated there are two parts to this proposal – preserving access to accessible suicide prevention education via free online training, and enabling smarter data use. Asking the local educational agencies (LEAs) to track suicide screening data, which has not been mandated to date, will help make informed decisions based on the data.

Commissioner Hill agreed with bringing information and training into schools to support students. He shared his experience of being taught the new Heimlich maneuver, a first-aid technique used to help someone who is choking, which was part of the curriculum for PE classes when he was 14 years old. Within a week of his learning, he was able to save his sibling's life by using the knowledge he gained in his PE class. This proposal is similar – having more information better prepares people to support one another. He thanked the Commission for focusing on this issue.

Public Comment and Open Dialogue

Laurel Benhamida, Ph.D., (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Okay. Alrighty. So, the legislation proposal is apparently built on the San Diego program and the California Department of Education model. So, is there enough hard data and other evidence, especially of fewer suicides, to suggest that the proposed program is evidence-based and effective? So, are you considering other approaches and pilot projects or established evidence-based programs, and have you rejected them before choosing

this particular San Diego and California state model? Will the programs and have the programs in San Diego been delivered in languages other than English? Will the approach engage students and families, not just parents but grandparents? Because they are often the people that children go to when they can't talk to their parents, and suicide is certainly hard to talk about.

So, parents and families who prefer to communicate and learn in languages other than English on a topic like suicide prevention. Is the psychological instrument that was mentioned used, normed, and available on populations who speak any languages other than English? And would the screening tool be available in any language other than English? Why is it a hard way to ask the question?

So, what's your thinking in having the program online instead of in person? Some people do better with in person, but others don't want to talk about this subject, think about it except maybe online. What age students would be trained? That's missing completely. How much per year do you plan to ask the Legislature to budget for this? We haven't heard a number. In the current climate, does that number have a chance? You have addressed that some legislators are interested. That's good. But numbers are numbers.

Given the current harassment of many immigrant and refugee families whose children are in public schools, this could be timely because this kind of harassment can lead to suicides. And so maybe other legislation funding focused on crisis care for children who have been impacted by hate speech and ICE actions, really anybody these days – Hispanics, Afghans, Somalis would be more timely. Thank you.

Commissioner Madrigal-Weiss clarified that the proposal is not based on San Diego's model. The example of collecting the suicide screening data is something that has been done in San Diego as the only county that has collected screening data; however, the best practice comes from the Commission's report. The online training was put forward in legislation in Assembly Bill (AB) 1808 to provide more accessibility to school communities. She agreed that other modalities could be considered.

Commissioner Madrigal-Weiss stated the proposal is an evidence-based program that relates to other languages and other cultures. This was looked at during the RFP process and will be looked at again to ensure that it will be made available in other languages besides English. The Colombia Risk Screening Tool is also an evidence-based tool that is available in multiple languages. One tool will not be mandated; the Commission's report recommended using any tool, as long as it is evidence-based.

Laurel Benhamida, Ph.D., stated: Well, thank you for addressing those. I know I had a lot of questions. So, one that I still don't understand is what age student would be considered.

Commissioner Madrigal-Weiss stated AB 1808 specified middle school and high school aged students. The proposal will also start there since that is the data that has been collected.

Laurel Benhamida, Ph.D., stated: And how much would the budget be per year?

Deputy Director Zoller stated the hope to use one of the state's platforms for the training. She stated it will be a one-time cost of \$1.5 million. The part that needs work is

funding for the data portion of the proposal. California law already requires schools to have a model suicide prevention policy, which mandates schools to do training and screeners. Staff is trying to be creative and avoid mandates in the proposed bill because it makes it difficult to pass in the Legislature. She stated she is happy to involve the public in this process.

Laurel Benhamida, Ph.D., stated: Well, thank you. I do remember that, in the first Trump Administration, when the public charge rule was announced, we had three refugees, I believe, all Afghan, but I'm not sure, who committed suicide. That's the wrong words, but I don't know the correct words. Anyway, (inaudible) upon hearing that news. So, if we can prevent this, more power.

Stacie Hiramoto (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Thank you. Stacie Hiramoto, REMHDCO, the Racial and Ethnic Mental Health Disparities Coalition. Some of these comments are hard to make for me because I don't want to give the impression that I think this is a bad program, and it sounds like a really wonderful program. What my question is, I've been going to the legislative meetings and there were so many proposals put forward and I'm even looking at the minutes, and it said that staff will present the refined proposals at the November Committee meeting, although it is noted that only one or two bills could probably be sponsored.

What I don't understand is why aren't at least two or three proposals put forward so this Committee could compare them? I mean, I know the Committee's busy and the staff is even busier, but I just feel like this is a sort of going back to business as usual, where the public makes comments but, really, the staff and the Commissioners are going to call the shots. And if that's the case, then that's fine. Just don't get our public comment.

This morning, one of the Commissioners asked a really good question. This morning, there was a vote in the Program Committee meeting that was related to something that would fund this proposal. And this proposal had not even been voted on and you voted on that. And I'm thinking this is kind of like, I mean, again, I'm not saying it is but it seems like insider dealing because, you know, it was just a surprise to see something being voted on that way.

The Commission's biggest projects are the BHSSA and the Mental Health Wellness Act. Neither one of those, in my opinion, focus or even address reducing disparities. This one may or may not. I'm glad you said it's in different languages. I'm not sure how it promotes equity or reduces disparities, but, again, I just I wish that at least two proposals could have been brought forward and the Committee could have discussed it instead of just one. Thank you.

Deputy Director Zoller agreed that it is better for the Committee to review multiple legislation proposals but all other submittals were works in progress and were not viable options at this time.

Executive Director Grealish added that, in terms of the processes, staff has been working on the flow between the Committees that stand alone and yet work together. The PAC Committee looks at issues through a programmatic lens, the LEX Committee looks at issues through a legislative lens, and the BFA Committee looks at issues

through a fiscal lens. These collective perspectives are brought to the full Commission for review and approval.

Stacie Hiramoto stated: So, if Kendra says, “Well, it wouldn’t make sense if it was just a budget proposal,” are those going to be considered in the Budget Committee tomorrow? I mean, there’s nothing that says that the Commission – because you have, in the past, done things through the budget.

Deputy Director Zoller stated one of the questions in the Decision-Making Framework is about identifying a funding source. It is a difficult time to ask for new funding. Staff suggested to many submitters to instead apply for grant funding.

Stacie Hiramoto stated: Yeah, it would be very difficult. Right.

Deputy Director Zoller stated many of these proposals were not new. The reason for the other effort in the PAC Committee was that the PAC Committee staff were already aware of them.

Executive Director Grealish stated today’s proposal was launch ready, while others are a work in progress.

Commissioner Fairweather suggested keeping Stacie Hiramoto’s comments in mind with this and any other legislative recommendation moving forward. She stated the need to continue to think about legislation through the lens of equity and the other priorities and how it can be shaped further to meet goals. She stated the comprehensive screenings can demonstrate more need and a lack of access to care among different groups that can then be used to address issues.

Fernando Pinon (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Okay. Thanks. And this was just in regards to the program that you guys are developing and how it might be better implemented. I don’t know if you’re coordinating with the Certified Wellness Coaches and that workstream that’s coming out through HCAI, but I know that they’re doing some program development on how they would train parents and the family unit. So, maybe there’s an intersect on suicide prevention and that group just so it gets further out there. And then, also wondering if, on the tracking of suicide data, if it’s tying into the greater CDC Syndromic Surveillance System or if it’s independent. Just thoughts and it’s all I had.

Commissioner Madrigal-Weiss stated it has not but it is something that should be worked on. Tracking and data are important. She clarified that this is not new but has been an ongoing project since 2021 and a long-time conversation with the Department of Health Care Services and others.

Carlene Davis (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Hi. Yes. Carlene Davis, California Black Women’s Health Project and California Reducing Disparities Project. And so, there has been mention that this is an evidence-based program, and I’m wondering to what extent that Black youth were part of that evidence. Was that evidence disaggregated by race and gender? Because, in fact, from about 2007 to 2020, the suicide rate for Black youth has risen by 144 percent. And so, for a program that’s

evidence-based, I would want to know that more than 6 percent of the students served were African-American because our population is small, but we are over represented in suicides.

And so, my concern is what is the equity in outcomes? Not like, oh, we serve 6 percent Black students. No, were there parity of outcomes? So, I would be interested to know that and to make sure that that data is being tracked, if it isn't already. It may be. This is my first time hearing, so you may already have all the information, which would be wonderful.

Commissioner Madrigal-Weiss stated this is not one program but is making available an accessible online training program and mandating school districts to track suicide risk screening data.

Carlene Davis stated: Okay. And, well, whether that's the curriculum – you said it's evidence-based, right? The tool is evidence-based?

Commissioner Madrigal-Weiss stated that is correct.

Carlene Davis stated: By whom?

Commissioner Madrigal-Weiss stated Columbia University.

Carlene Davis stated: Yeah. Well, just want to make sure.

Commissioner Madrigal-Weiss stated her organization used the Columbia University Suicide Severity Level Screening Tool and the LivingWorks Start online training.

Carlene Davis stated: I would just want to make sure that any screening tool works for Black students. That's my bottom line then. Does it work for Black students?

Commissioner Madrigal-Weiss stated it does.

Carlene Davis stated: Because our numbers are so small in the state, there's often a tendency for us to become very marginalized and so evidence-based does not always accurately represent the needs of Black people. I just want to lift that up.

Committee Discussion, continued

Commissioner Larsen thanked staff and the presenters for their work over the years to get to this proposal today. She stated she is grateful for the public commenters who provide feedback at meetings. She noted that the public comment today helped the Committee make a more informed decision.

Action: Vice Chair Callan asked for a motion that the LEX Committee recommends that the full Commission approves sponsoring a bill for Sustaining and Supporting Suicide Prevention in Schools for the 2026 legislative session. Commissioner Callan made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Thomas-Beckett, that:

- *The Legislative and External Affairs Advisory Committee recommends that the full Commission approves sponsoring a bill for Sustaining and Supporting Suicide Prevention in Schools for the 2026 legislative session.*

Motion passed 5 yes, 0 no, and 0 abstain, per roll call vote as follows:

The following LEX Committee Members voted “Yes”: Commissioners Fairweather, Hill, Larsen, and Thomas-Beckett, and Vice Chair Callan.

Agenda Item 6: Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA) Stakeholder Toolkit Update – Information

Vice Chair Callan stated the Committee will receive an update on the development of a BHSA Stakeholder Toolkit aimed at helping the public effectively participate in the community planning process. He asked staff to present this agenda item.

Riann Kopchak, Assistant Deputy Director, Legislative and External Affairs, provided an overview, with a slide presentation, of the project goals, community engagement, toolkit outline, and next steps. She stated the first draft of the toolkit was debuted at the December 11, 2025, Listening Session for community feedback. That feedback is being incorporated into the toolkit. A webinar is planned for January 23, 2026, to debut the final project. A link to the final toolkit will be sent through the CBH distribution list and posted on the website. Feedback will continue to be accepted as a part of the ongoing refinement of this toolkit for future iterations.

Committee Discussion

Commissioner Thomas-Beckett thanked staff for making the toolkit easy to understand, inclusive, and available in multiple languages.

Commissioner Larsen suggested including ongoing community engagement and broadening it beyond the community planning process by participating in local behavioral health boards, boards of supervisors, city council meetings, and other opportunities to be engaged and practice skills.

Commissioner Fairweather suggested including definitions for terms and acronyms.

Public Comment and Open Dialogue

Stacie Hiramoto (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Hi. I just didn't want to go first and be hogging the space. Sorry. That's why I lag behind. I just want to commend Riann and the Commission for doing this. This is so important. I've tried to do it with groups myself and I really think that people need to hear it more than one time. And this is wonderful that you're putting this booklet out and I think it's going to be very helpful and I really like the suggestion of Commissioner Larsen to put some suggestions of ongoing action or involvement with the local mental health boards and the board of supervisors. But thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Laurel Benhamida, Ph.D., (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Hello again. So, yes, this sounds like a great project. Just a few suggestions. Be careful if you're thinking about using auto translate for your materials. There are pitfalls. You really need a human trained professional translator to at least be the final word. And, actually, I would say you need to pilot your languages other than English versions with some of the

people in the groups that you got together and others because we have – well, for example with Punjabi, it is written in two different scripts, one in India and really I think by Sikhs all over the world, and then another script in Pakistan. So, legibility is important for that particular language.

The other would be the care in the use of technical terms that may not occur in the language of the speakers who speak languages other than English. Are the translated terms even used in that language? Are people familiar with them? And that's what you'll get if you do a pilot and get feedback with those translated versions. You'll find out. They'll say, "We don't use this word. We've never heard of it."

I've been urging the Care Court Working Group to do this for – I guess it's more than a year now. And they have just come out with auto-translated, I think. I haven't really reviewed them; I haven't had any of my colleagues review them, but versions of certain training materials and other items and I'm waiting to see if people actually understand them. Yeah, this is a new tool. Machine translation's been worked on for decades, but being used the way it is now is a little bit different and newer.

So, those are just some tips. Thank you very much. Good work.

Agenda Item 7: Adjournment

Vice Chair Callan stated the next LEX Committee meeting will likely be held on February 19, 2026. He thanked everyone for their participation and adjourned the meeting at approximately 3:00 p.m.