

State of California

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY COMMISSION

Commission Meeting Minutes

Date January 22, 2026
Time 9:00 a.m.
Location BHSOAC
1812 9th Street
Sacramento, California 95811
and Virtual (Zoom)

Members Participating:

Alfred Rowlett, M.B.A., M.S.W., Chair	Brandon Fernandez, M.P.H.
Rayshell Chambers, M.P.A., Vice Chair	David Gordon, Ed.M.
Michael Bernick, J.D.* ¹	Assemblymember John Harabedian by Rosielyn Pulmano
Mark Bontrager, J.D., M.S.W.	Karen Larsen
Sheriff Bill Brown, M.P.A.	Mara Madrigal-Weiss, M.Ed.
Keyondria Bunch, Ph.D.	Gladys Mitchell, M.S.W.
Robert Callan, Jr.	Jay Robinson, Psy.D., M.B.A.
Christopher Contreras	Marvin Southard, Ph.D., M.S.W.*
Senator Dave Cortese, J.D. by Marjorie Swartz	Jay'Riah Thomas-Beckett, M.A.*
Makenzie Cross	Gary Tsai, M.D., DFAPA, FASAM
Amy Fairweather, J.D.	Jevon Wilkes

*Participated remotely

¹ a.m. only

Members Absent:

Mayra Alvarez, M.H.A.
Pamela Baer
Steve Carnevale
Shuo Chen, J.D.
Tumboura Hill

BHSOAC Meeting Staff Present:

Brenda Grealish, Executive Director	Research, Evaluation, and Program Operations
Sandra Gallardo, Chief Counsel	
Courtney Ackerman, Research Scientist,	Melissa Martin-Mollard, Ph.D., Acting

Deputy Director, Research, Evaluation,
and Program Operations
Lauren Quintero, Acting Deputy Director
of Administrative Services and
Performance Management
Kendra Zoller, Deputy Director, Legislative

and External Affairs
Amariani Martinez, Administrative Support
Lester Robancho, Health Program
Specialist
Cody Scott, Meeting Logistics Technician

[Note: Agenda Item 9 was taken out of order. These minutes reflect this Agenda Item as listed on the agenda and not as taken in chronological order.]

Opening Business and Administrative Items

1: Call to Order and Roll Call – Information

Chair Alfred Rowlett called the meeting of the Behavioral Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (BHSOAC, Commission, or Commission for Behavioral Health (CBH)) to order at 9:03 a.m. and welcomed everyone. The meeting was on Zoom, via teleconference, and held at the BHSOAC headquarters, located at 1812 9th Street, Sacramento, California 95811.

Sandra Gallardo, Chief Counsel, called the roll and confirmed the presence of a quorum. Attending in Person: Chair Rowlett, Vice Chair Chambers, and Commissioners Bontrager (arrived at 9:13am), Brown, Bunch, Callan, Contreras, Designee Swartz for Cortese, Cross, Fairweather, Fernandez, Gordon, Designee Pulmano for Harabedian, Larsen, Madrigal-Weiss, Mitchell, Robinson, Tsai (arrived at 9:08am), and Wilkes. Attending Remotely: Commissioners Bernick, Southard (arrived at 9:39am), and Thomas-Beckett.

Amariani Martinez, Commission staff, reviewed the meeting protocols.

2: Announcements and Caring Moment – Information

Chair Rowlett gave the announcements as follows:

Two-Day Meeting

Today's meeting will take place over two days. Today's meeting will adjourn at 4 p.m. The Commission will reconvene tomorrow, January 23, 2026, at 9:00 a.m. and will adjourn at 1:00 p.m.

Recent Contract Amendments

Brief updates will be provided on recent contract amendments during all Committee and Commission meeting announcements, for informational purposes only. Contract amendments are negotiated between the Commission and the contractor and must be mutually agreed upon.

This month, six new contracts have been executed and six contracts have been amended. The new contracts are under \$100,000, executed under designated authority,

and included in the PowerPoint presentations at each relevant December 2025 CBH Committee meeting as follows:

- California Department of the Military for \$50,580 for an IT audit.
- S&P Technology Solutions for \$48,677 for Cornerstone training software for staff and Commissioners.
- One Mind for \$65,000 to convene California leaders to shape a comprehensive program to support workforce mental health.
- California School-Based Health Alliance for \$25,000 for scholarships to their annual School Health and Behavioral Health Conference this year.
- University of California, San Francisco, for \$175,000 for an interagency agreement for Full-Service Partnership (FSP) evaluation.
- Leading Resources, Inc., for \$96,250 to facilitate an update to the strategic plan.

Six advocacy contracts have been amended to include work with Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA) priority populations as follows:

- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
- Cal Voices
- Mental Health America of California (MHAC)
- California Association of Veteran Service Agencies (CAVSA)
- California Pan-Ethnic Health Network (CPEHN)
- United Parents

Community Planning Process Toolkit

The Commission will soon launch its new Community Planning Process Toolkit. This toolkit is designed to help members of the public participate in their county's Community Planning Process. The Commission is grateful for those who helped put this toolkit together from state agencies, community-based organizations, county behavioral health departments, and especially everyone who attended the two listening sessions, bringing wonderful examples and ideas.

The toolkit will be published on the website, making it accessible from the home page, and will continue to be refined and expanded over time. Updates will be shared through email and social media and provided to the Commission's advocacy partners to help activate their networks.

New Staff

Chair Rowlett asked Melissa Martin-Mollard, Ph.D., Acting Deputy Director of Research, Evaluation, and Program Operations, to share recent staff changes.

- Acting Deputy Director Martin-Mollard stated three new staff have joined the Commission's Research, Evaluation, and Program Operations team since the last Commission meeting. She introduced Carrie Greene, Staff Services

Manager; Christina Crews, Health Program Specialist 2; and Cristina Valdez, Health Program Specialist 1.

On behalf of the Commission, Chair Rowlett welcomed Carrie Greene, Christina Crews, and Cristina Valdez to the Commission.

Caring Moment

Commission meetings will begin with a “caring moment,” as suggested by Commissioner Robinson, to help Commissioners center themselves on the purpose of the work and the people served. This practice is meant to remind everyone why the Commission does what it does, to share stories or moments that may impact others in ways that are not always seen, and to provide an opportunity to reflect on how to better serve the community.

Commissioner Gordon shared a success story of the Commission’s work in the youth behavioral health space. He stated the Commission’s Community Engagement Team traveled to Fresno and Riverside in October of 2025 with representatives from the Jakara Movement, the Commission’s K-12 Student Advocacy Grantee, to participate in the Vibe Check: Teen Mental Health Conference. Youth engaged with local experts in the behavioral health space and heard a presentation from former NBA star Metta World Peace, who has battled behavioral health challenges throughout his life, on the importance of wellness and prioritizing mental health.

Commissioner Gordon stated Commission staff offered valuable college, career, and health resources and assisted in facilitating breakout sessions. The event provided attendees with a safe, welcoming space to connect with one another and discuss their behavioral health journey through a culturally responsible lens.

Commissioner Gordon stated, during the event, an attendee shared that mental health is not discussed in school or at home and that it was nice to be able to do so at this conference. In a post-conference survey, attendees expressed increased comfort in discussing mental health topics with friends, family, or teachers after attending the conference.

Commissioner Gordon noted that these conferences are funded through the Commission’s K-12 Student Advocacy Program and focus on innovative ways to engage students from underserved and marginalized communities. To date, over 700 students have attended the conferences. He stated he looks forward to attending the final conference this spring in Oakland and seeing the Commission’s partnership with the Jakara Movement continue to show the power of the Commission’s advocacy contracts in laying the groundwork for wellness at the grassroots level.

Commissioner Gordon shared a personal story about something that happened in his organization recently. He stated one of his employees, who has worked with him for eight years and has been in the country for over 20 years, was taken from her home by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) workers as she got into her car to drive to work. He stated she was taken in an unmarked vehicle to a place where she was transferred to an ICE vehicle that took her to a private prison that had been set up for this purpose in the Bakersfield area. She managed to get her supervisor, who alerted Commissioner Gordon. He immediately sent his chief counsel to the ICE office

and secured an immigration attorney for his employee. Although the attorney filed a writ to have her released, she spent 12 days at the Bakersfield ICE location.

Commissioner Gordon stated it worked out all right for his employee, but these kinds of tactics are something he never thought he would see in America. He stated he is impressed and honored by the resistance that is building around this frightening issue. This is exactly what is needed. He stated he wanted to share this story because, although the issues are real, they were not personal for him before. He stated concern that this happened to his employee who has done nothing but add value to the U.S. culture, community, and economy.

3: Executive Director's Update – Information

Executive Director Brenda Grealish provided an overview, with a slide presentation, of the accomplishments; upcoming priorities; and risks, challenges, and mitigation strategies of the Commission from May 2025 through January 2026. Accomplishments included Commissioner strategic priorities and Committee implementation, improving staff team operational excellence, budget activities and financial health, and collaboration and engagement. She thanked Commissioners for their continued leadership, partnership, and engagement. She stated she appreciated the guidance and support of the Commission while working collectively to strengthen California's behavioral health system and advance equitable, person-centered care for all communities.

Commissioner Comments & Questions

Commissioner Fairweather suggested adding the California Department of Veteran Affairs (CalVet) to the list of regular engagement with system partners.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

4: General Public Comment – Information

Joe Banez (attended in person) stated: Good morning, Commissioners. My name is Joe Banez, and I'm with Shatterproof, a national nonprofit focused on addiction. Among other things, we work with DHCS on Treatment Atlas, which is a free confidential substance use treatment locator available to all Californians online. Before I begin, I want to extend a warm congratulations to our relatively new chair and vice chair on your new roles, and look forward to more of your leadership on the Commission.

I also want to recognize Executive Director Brenda Grealish for her steady leadership of the growing team here. Lastly, I also want to acknowledge the uncertainty and issues we continue to see at both the federal and state level, and have great respect for the challenge this Commission has ahead.

Many of you may know that January is recognized as Substance Use Treatment Month, so it is an appropriate time to reflect on how we connect Californians to quality substance use care.

You might agree that data can be the bridge between policy and person-centered results, and I'd like to share a few brief insights from the past year that may inform some of your work. In 2025, through treatmentatlas.org, the platform was utilized over 1.2 million times. That's a roughly 85 percent more usage compared to 2024, showing a significant and growing demand for transparent information on substance use treatment. Our data also reveals a hierarchy of needs. The top three substances for which California sought support for were alcohol, followed by opioids, and then stimulants.

While the level of treatments range, the top recommended and searched levels of treatment included residential treatment. And while our users primarily use Treatment Atlas to search for substance use treatment, they aren't just looking for clinical help. They sought other support, including housing, transportation, and food assistance.

So, as you evaluate the proposals and policies before you this year, today, in the future, I hope some of these insights highlight the necessity of a holistic approach to recovery and opportunities for us to work together. So, thank you for your dedication to the behavioral health of the Golden State and I look forward to supporting your work throughout this year. Thank you.

Stacie Hiramoto (attended in person) stated: Good morning, Commissioners. Stacie Hiramoto with REMHDCO, the Racial and Ethnic Mental Health Disparities Coalition. A couple things: First, I would like to take this personal privilege to have you welcome my two MSW interns, Ash Wilhelm and Sarahi Soto-Talavera. Can you please stand? They have been going to a lot of your Committee meetings and they are really fabulous. They have so much experience, and they made the drive all the way from Oakland today to be here. And I want to thank Brenda, too. I was so delighted when Brenda was named to be Executive Director and she has not disappointed, and I really want to thank her for the exchange.

But I actually really want to thank you, Commissioner Gordon, for bringing up something that really does have to do with mental health. And it's funny because, when you were talking, I could tell it's personal. And I don't talk about this lot, but my parents and my grandparents and my family of that generation were interned, of course. We're actually starting to now call it being imprisoned during World War II for nothing but being Japanese.

And it's funny because I didn't even hear until I was in my 20s about my grandfather, who was a community leader. And so, only a couple days after Pearl Harbor, the FBI came to our house. And it's funny, they lived in Lodi – this little dinky farm town, but they already knew that my grandfather was a community leader. And they took him away and they didn't tell the family where they were taking him. They searched, they ransacked the house, but I didn't hear about this until my late 20s because my family was so traumatized.

And the only way they found out where he was taken was because my aunt was the secretary in the city hall with the mayor, and so she called him. And they found out that he was taken I think to Stockton and then San Francisco, and then to someplace in Texas. And then, of course, my whole family was interned. They were sent to Arkansas. And at least he was able to rejoin them in Arkansas.

But it does have to do with mental health, but I thank you, because it is really difficult. I mean, these are very extraordinary times that we're in right now, and I really want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for acknowledging that because it's true. One thing that is different – and there was a show, Rachel Maddow has a good show on the internment.

But I'm very proud to be in this country, because people are standing up, unlike when my grandparents and parents were put in the concentration camps. There were only a few people that stood up. But because people like you and others are willing to stand up, things are different. Things are still terrible right now, but I am proud that people in this country are standing up. So, thank you, thank you.

Laurel Benhamida, Ph.D. (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Good morning. This is Laurel Benhamida from Muslim American Society – Social Services Foundation in Sacramento, with a statewide reach, and REMHDCO. Thank you, Stacie. Thank you very much, Commissioner Gordon. We needed your story because there are some meetings going on now regarding Proposition 1 in which it seems like the meeting is being held on another planet. No mention at all is being made of what is happening on our streets and, literally, in our homes in this country. Thank you very much, and I hope the Commission will consider doing whatever it can to hear voices like yours, Stacie and Commissioner Gordon. Thank you.

Carli Stelzer (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Thank you. Good morning, Commissioners. Carly Stelzer, on behalf of the California Behavioral Health Association. I just really want to appreciate the comments that have been made and the acknowledgement for the things that are happening in the environment that folks are living in and experiencing, and just the genuine fears that our communities are facing. I really appreciate the comments from the Commissioners and our colleagues over at REMHDCO.

We also want to acknowledge the two-day meeting. We really appreciate the amount of time that we'll be able to spend on all the topics and knowing that we won't have to worry about losing quorum. And we know this is a huge lift for the Commission staff and all of the Commissioners to be here and dedicate this much time to really diving into all of these topics. And so, we really appreciate being able to experience that as a member of the public.

Given the comments that were made about the things happening, due to the federal administration and the environments being created by some of those policies, we want to continue to encourage the Commission to think creatively about how this body can fill some of the gaps and address issues outside of what's possible through state and federal programs. CBHA feels like the Commission always does a really wonderful job of finding ways to fill in some of these essential gaps, and we just want to continue to encourage that as we see issues coming down further from the federal government and continuing to impact our communities. So, thank you so much and looking forward to today's meeting.

Beverly Kaveti James (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Thank you so much for your time. My name is Beverly James. I am from South Texas in McAllen, Texas. I now reside here in Roseville, California. I was previously homeless with my daughter in

Sacramento, California. And the reason we came here to California is due to my domestic violence with my daughter's father. Unfortunately, he did make threats, and so we had to relocate safely here.

I am making this public comment to advocate on behalf of people that I've met not only here in Sacramento and in California, but also in Texas. But seeing how the community really needs to step up and stop relying on technology so heavily when it comes to making a diagnosis. And the reason I'm saying this is because, even myself, I have gone to a doctor where I trusted them enough to open up about not only my trauma, but also things I've experienced but, unfortunately, they handed me a tablet. And I was shocked. I was honestly disappointed that I had to do a survey in order to not only get a diagnosis and get answers, but also to get their attention. And, for me, that's not being a medical doctor, let alone someone that is a counselor or someone that you're trusting with this information.

Personally, I understand, as somebody that was born in the 1990s, I love that technology is advancing, but we are human beings. And beyond technology, we can better equip our communities by talking, by communicating, by listening to people, hearing them out, and truly not only having a whole person approach to their medical care, but especially regarding their mental health. So I just want to encourage you all that, while you may receive funding for AI or any sort of technology to use to diagnose individuals, remember, we are humans first. I can only imagine when you went to your university studying hard, even if you used a computer, regardless, you studied yourself. You didn't use AI. You didn't rely on AI for your first patient. You used the knowledge that you learned firsthand.

So, I want to extend that encouragement. Please, always have, as that gentleman said before, a holistic approach. When you speak to people, see them first as humans. Don't just see them as someone you can hand a tablet to or give a diagnosis to. I've seen plenty of veterans, unfortunately, have whole drawers of pills. And all the doctor said was, here you go, every time, and handed them a bottle, every time. I've seen even youth that get diagnosed and they're handed pills. And all they did was, again, use a tablet. I pray that you're granted the wisdom and discernment to know that you are wise enough to diagnose and to take care of your communities.

And I want to also encourage the research and advocacy side of your Committee to please look into this, because, even though technology may advance and help to, as they say, lighten the load, we still have that responsibility and to take accountability for each and every individual that it may fail. Thank you for your time, and God bless you.

Kim Stafford (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: My name is Kim Stafford. I serve as chair of the behavioral health board, County of Marin. I'm not speaking on anyone's behalf, but my own. I absolutely agree with Beverly 100 percent. If you want to set up a system for people with behavioral health issues, or mental health issues, they have to be speaking to a psychiatrist from the county. You can't just have clinics that refer people to online services. People need to speak directly to people that are qualified. And I just urge the Commission to consider getting on board with this. You really need to. Thank you.

Casey Alrich (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Thank you very much. Thank you for making the time today. I just wanted to take a quick moment to note my appreciation for the Executive Director's update. Executive Director Grealish had made time in early December to work with my organization, California Bridge, to speak at our virtual regional collaborative and inform the close to 200 attendees that we had on that project about the BHSA process and how they could be involved. It's something that we've been focusing on for a lot of 2025, and it was great to have her perspective and to kind of lay that out. So, I want to second her availability, and we really appreciate that.

And then just to the last couple speakers, I couldn't agree more with what they're saying, and I think here at California Bridge, we're really looking to push rapid access to substance use disorder treatment and maintain that human-to-human connection. And very much trying to understand how best we can make use of technology to connect the people and the individuals that have the tools and the resources and the community knowledge to provide access to care. So, while I'm excited to hear about the technological advancements that we're all making, I think maintaining that person-to-person contact is really critical to connecting an individual with care immediately when they need it in that moment. So, thank you all very much, and I look forward to the rest of the meeting.

Monica Zuniga Fajuri (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Thank you. My name is Monica Zuniga. I work in a CDEP for a Latinx community, and I just want to acknowledge and appreciate the Commission for hearing us and for at least considering CDEPs as part of the Innovation Fund. In a state and federal environment that is becoming more threatening for immigrant communities, being heard truly matters. The most vulnerable and unserved communities are facing fear, instability, and growing barriers to care. Knowing that the Commission is listening and open to community-driven programs gives us hope. Even this step shows respect for us, for the lives that we experience, and recognizes the value of culturally-rooted organizations serving the most vulnerable people. Thank you.

5: Meeting Minutes – Action

Chair Rowlett stated the Commission will consider approval of the minutes from the August 28, 2025, and November 20, 2025, Commission meetings. He noted that the reason the August 28, 2025, minutes are being considered again today is because the Commission decided to revise the minutes of the August meeting to include names of public commenters and additional detail on comments around the discussion of the Innovation Partnership Fund (IPF). He stated meeting minutes and recordings are posted on the Commission's website.

There were no questions from Commissioners and no public comment.

Action: Chair Rowlett asked for a motion to approve the August 28, 2025, meeting minutes. Commissioner Brown made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Callan, that:

- *The Commission approves the August 28, 2025, Meeting Minutes, as presented.*

Motion passed 17 yes, 0 no, and 3 abstain, per roll call vote as follows:

The following Commissioners voted “Yes”: Commissioners Bontrager, Callan, Contreras, Senate Designee Swartz, Cross, Fairweather, Fernandez, Gordon, Assembly Designee Pulmano, Larsen, Madrigal-Weiss, Mitchell, Southard, Thomas-Beckett, and Tsai, Vice Chair Chambers, and Chair Rowlett.

The following Commissioners abstained: Commissioners Brown, Bunch, and Wilkes.

Action: Chair Rowlett asked for a motion to approve the November 20, 2025, meeting minutes. Commissioner Southard made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Madrigal-Weiss, that:

- *The Commission approves the November 20, 2025, Meeting Minutes, as presented.*

Motion passed 18 yes, 0 no, and 3 abstain, per roll call vote as follows:

The following Commissioners voted “Yes”: Commissioners Bontrager, Brown, Bunch, Callan, Senate Designee Swartz, Cross, Fairweather, Fernandez, Gordon, Assembly Designee Pulmano, Larsen, Madrigal-Weiss, Mitchell, Southard, Thomas-Beckett, and Tsai, Vice Chair Chambers, and Chair Rowlett.

The following Commissioners abstained: Commissioners Contreras, Robinson, and Wilkes.

6: Consent Calendar – Action

Chair Rowlett stated all matters listed on the Consent Calendar are routine or noncontroversial and can be acted upon in one motion. There will be no separate discussion of these items prior to the time that the Commission votes on the motion unless a Commissioner requests a specific item to be removed from the Consent Calendar for individual action. He noted that the documents related to these projects and the staff analyses are included in the meeting materials.

Chair Rowlett stated this month’s Consent Calendar includes innovation plans from San Bernardino and Tulare Counties, two intent to awards, and one contract amendment.

Innovation Proposals:

Chair Rowlett stated the following two innovation proposals align with the BHSA and include plans for sustainability.

1. Innovation Plan for San Bernardino County: Peer Housing Project, up to \$2,089,845 for 3.5 years.
2. Innovation Plan for Tulare County: Semi-Statewide Electronic Health Record (EHR) Project PHASE 2, up to \$456,440 for 2 years.

Intent to Awards

3. FSP Grant: Intent to Award, up to \$10 million.

Chair Rowlett deferred to Executive Director Grealish to present the two intent to awards.

Executive Director Grealish stated the Commission released a Request for Proposals (RFP) on October 23, 2025, to award up to \$10 million for 3 years to provide technical assistance in performance management to county behavioral health departments and their contracted FSP service providers. The application closed on December 2, 2025. She announced the Commission's intent to award a contract to Third Sector Capital Partners.

4. 0-5 Technical Assistance Grant: Intent to Award \$1,601,000.

Executive Director Grealish stated the Commission released an RFP on November 21, 2025, to award up to \$1,601,000 for 3 years to provide technical assistance to the other grantees of this grant. The application closed on December 31, 2025. She announced the Commission's intent to award a contract to Public Health Institute.

Contract Amendment

5. Contract amendment for 23MHSOAC020 with iBridge, \$245,720 for one year.

Chair Rowlett stated the Budget and Finance Advisory Committee (BFA Committee) recommended the approval of a contract amendment for contract 23MHSOAC020 with iBridge on December 16, 2025, for \$245,720. This amendment would extend the contract for 12 months to continue hosting and maintaining the Commission's data center infrastructure.

There were no questions from Commissioners and no public comment.

Action: Chair Rowlett asked for a motion to approve the Consent Calendar. Commissioner Madrigal-Weiss made a motion to approve the Consent Calendar, seconded by Commissioner Bunch, that:

- *The Commission approves the Consent Calendar that includes:*
 - *Innovation Plan for San Bernardino County: Peer Housing Project, up to \$2,089,845 for 3.5 years.*
 - *Innovation Plan for Tulare County: Semi-Statewide Electronic Health Record (EHR) Project PHASE 2, up to \$456,440 for 2 years.*
 - *Full-Service Partnership Grant: Intent to Award, up to \$10,000,000.*
 - *0-5 Technical Assistance Grant: Intent to Award \$1,600,000.*
 - *Contract amendment for 23MHSOAC020 with iBridge, \$245,720 for one year.*

Motion passed 18 yes, 0 no, and 3 abstain, per roll call vote as follows:

The following Commissioners voted "Yes": Commissioners Bontrager, Brown, Bunch, Callan, Contreras, Cross, Fairweather, Fernandez, Gordon, Larsen, Madrigal-Weiss, Mitchell, Robinson, Southard, Thomas-Beckett, Tsai, and Wilkes, and Chair Rowlett.

The following Commissioner abstained: Senate Designee Swartz and Assembly Designee Pulmano, and Vice Chair Chambers.

7: Stretch Break

Due to time constraints, no stretch break was taken.

Program Advisory Committee & Client, Family, and Community Inclusion, Lived Experience, and Diversity Advisory Committee Updates and Recommendations

8: Innovation Partnership Fund Grant Outline – Action

Chair Rowlett stated the Commission will review and consider approval of the IPF RFP outline, with the goal of enabling timely release of funding in alignment with BHTA implementation beginning July 1, 2026. He noted that Commissioner Carnevale submitted a concept paper requesting that 20 percent of the IPF be allocated to build the strategic, data, and financing foundations necessary to guide the deployment of the remaining 80 percent of funds.

Vice Chair Chambers summarized the input received at the last Client, Family, and Community Inclusion, Lived Experience, and Diversity Advisory Committee (CFC Committee) meeting on the IPF grant outline. She stated the CFC Committee suggested prioritizing peer-run, tribal, and smaller community-based organizations; including efficient data collection and ways to ensure project success and sustainability; and emphasizing equity, sustainability, data, evaluation, and specific target populations. She noted that several of these suggestions were incorporated into the outline being presented today.

Chair Rowlett asked staff to present this agenda item.

Acting Deputy Director Martin-Mollard provided an overview, with a slide presentation, of the efforts to date, RFP outline components informed by IPF Framework 4.0, feedback received to date, and RFP outline component elements to consider. She asked a series of questions to facilitate the discussion as follows:

- What does success look like and what metrics should the Commission use to measure this?
- How should the Commission best assess potential for sustainability in the application process?
- How do we ensure grantees have the capability to accurately and successfully collect, track, and apply data to ensure continuous improvement?

Commissioner Comments & Questions

Commissioner Gordon stated access to services varies greatly by community but this seems to be a one-size-fits-all assessment. He asked how to tell the difference between grant proposals, when the mix of conventional medical systems, school-provided programs, and community-based service-provided programs will vary depending upon the community it is funded for. He stated it is important to tailor IPF investments to community need. Applications should include how the need was assessed and how projects were chosen.

Commissioner Tsai stated the IPF was envisioned to be a framework that focuses on key areas designed to be all-encompassing to specifically try to build in flexibility.

Commissioner Fairweather stated her assumption that the applicants will provide a rationale and a landscape and demonstrate a gap in services as a way to measure the need.

Commissioner Fairweather referred to the Mandatory Components presentation slide and asked how to measure the requirement that projects must support county programs.

Acting Deputy Director Martin-Mollard stated the need for the projects to demonstrate that they support county behavioral health efforts to implement the BHSA, such as improving access, quality, outcomes, and service delivery.

Commissioner Mitchell referred to the Nuts and Bolts: Eligibility and Scoring presentation slide and asked about the requirement that projects not duplicate existing efforts. She asked why successful projects cannot be duplicated or expanded.

Acting Deputy Director Martin-Mollard stated the language allows for expansion of projects that have been demonstrated to be effective in one community but have not been implemented more broadly.

Commissioner Callan stated applications must convey how they will be financially sustainable beyond the life of the grant. He asked about the definition for “financially sustainable.”

Acting Deputy Director Martin-Mollard stated, because there will likely be various types of applications received and projects funded, the sustainability mechanisms will look different depending on the project, who is applying, and what the project involves. The goal is to fund projects that can demonstrate that they are not reliant on the IPF but that they have other mechanisms to continue the project.

Vice Chair Chambers suggested leveraging working with external partners with these grants to support grantees and to help grantees make trusting relationships with counties.

Commissioner Fairweather stated there should not be an over-reliance on the probability of being able to draw down public funds, because there are marginalized communities who will not be eligible for those, or organizations that are very effective, but small that do not have the necessary administrative capacity. She stated the need for plans for sustainability that show capacity and understanding of how to raise money with private grants or philanthropy that they can go to; otherwise, some of the most innovative organizations are excluded – the ones that are most in touch with, in contact with, and embedded within their own communities.

Commissioner Gordon stated in many cases it is about a reconfiguration of the way the funds and services are deployed through a collaboration of both counties and managed care plans, because continuing to deploy them the same way will garner the same results. Redeployment doesn't need to be controversial if a case can be made that they are delivering the services where needed.

Commissioner Larsen cautioned against using these funds to backfill projects that have been cut due to the changes under the BHSA. She stated the Commission is mandated to fund projects that are innovative and that are partnerships that make a measurable change for underserved communities.

Assembly Designee Pulmano agreed with Commissioner comments on sustainability. She stated the Behavioral Health Continuum Infrastructure Program (BHCIP) and the Behavioral Health Community-Based Organized Networks of Equitable Care and Treatment (BH-CONNECT), waiver programs administered by the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), are examples of long-term sustainability that the Commission should consider.

Assembly Designee Pulmano recommended assessing the factors for sustainability, since sustainability cannot be one-size-fits-all.

Assembly Designee Pulmano stated the Commission and all state departments need to be keeping track of data. She stated the Data Exchange Framework, administered by the Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI), was established and agreed upon by the Administration and the Legislature to facilitate the sharing of health and social services information and improving outcomes and equity.

Assembly Designee Pulmano requested presentations on Electronic Health Records (EHR) by the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA) and the Data Exchange Framework by HCAI at a future meeting. These things must be put together. Counties are not quite open to the idea of sharing information, but it cannot be business as usual. There has to be some interconnectivity with their treatment, and that depends on how much data providers and community-based organizations are getting about the populations served.

Commissioner Gordon stated collaboration with the counties is crucial. He suggested accounting for that in the grant applications.

Commissioner Wilkes suggested focusing on the most vulnerable populations in California, such as veterans and justice-involved, foster, and homeless youth. He stated the need for collaboration and leveraging other funding sources to provide holistic care for the individual.

Commissioner Brown stated the need to ensure that this funding is used wisely and that it leverages additional funding and partnerships in addressing common goals. He gave the example of the Golden Gate suicide net project that required additional funding to complete. They sought funding from a variety of different local, state, and federal organizations, individual investments, donations from private organizations and individuals, and Proposition 63 funding from this Commission. He stated the need for this Commission to have the vision to collectively work with public or public-private partnerships.

Commissioner Callan stated the need for marketing to get the word out to the public that this fund exists. There is a chance to make major changes with this limited amount of funding. Clarity of vision and protocols for scrutiny of the data as a matter of process are important.

Commissioner Cross stated the need to ensure that everyone knows that this funding can be transformational within the community in order to attract entities that want to be a part of that transformation.

Vice Chair Chambers stated concern that, when making private investments with for-profit companies, they develop something and then they sell it back, and the public does not get access to it. She suggested incentivizing philanthropists and private entities with shared goals and values that it is for the good of the people and not for the profit of their shareholders.

Commissioner Gordon suggested that applications include assurance that the county is committed to supporting the project, not to be disqualifying if a county is not interested, but to learn the number of counties that are interested in supporting a proposal.

Commissioner Mitchell stated, regarding sustainability, applications can include that they have asked the county for collaboration, but counties may not want to keep a program going past the grant period. She stated data is part of the process but the real data about impacts and outcomes comes from the people who receive the services. She suggested a requirement that the data comes from live interviews.

Commissioner Fernandez stated providers need the opportunity to innovate, but it is important to remember sometimes the innovation will not succeed.

Commissioner Callan asked if it is possible for the Commission to receive equity funding from an investor in a project that it funded with innovation funding.

Chief Counsel Gallardo stated she will need to do further research, but she believed it can, depending on the structure of it.

Chair Rowlett stated he does not know how successful they were, but the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) embarked upon doing that with some of their funding.

Senate Designee Swartz agreed with Commissioner Larson about stressing innovation. She stated there is misunderstanding about the purpose of the IPF. She suggested inviting representatives from the California Health and Human Services Agency (CalHHS) to present at a future Commission meeting on their intent for the IPF. The reason innovation was taken from the counties and given to the Commission was because they felt that funding was not being spent in innovative ways.

Commissioner Madrigal-Weiss stated the need to be thoughtful and careful and not leave anyone out because of the relationship with counties. Sometimes counties can be innovation averse.

Chair Rowlett stated Darrell Steinberg, Rusty Selix, and Richard Van Horn sat down together and, despite the naysayers, crafted an idea for funding that would change the trajectory of behavioral health in the state of California and in the nation, which became Proposition 63. This innovative funding idea also established this Commission. Proposition 1 took that innovative idea and added specific parameters. This \$20 million is to help come up with an innovative funding solution for sustainability.

Chair Rowlett stated the Commission has spent millions of dollars on innovation but does not have data on everything that has or has not worked. He asked that the

Commission think of the IPF differently. He stated this is an opportunity for the Commission to be a catalyst for a new way of thinking about sustainable funding and partnerships.

Public Comment

Ash Wilhelm (attended in person) stated: Good morning, Commissioners. My name is Ash Wilhelm, my pronouns are they/them, and I'm speaking today on behalf of the CRDP and Safe Passages in Alameda County. I just wanted to start with gratitude. This has been a long and, at times, exhausting process, and I just showed up, like, 5 months ago, and have been showing up to these meetings and reviewing it, and it's a lot. So, thank you. And I sincerely want to recognize the Commission and staff for having made real improvements, based on stakeholder feedback. And in particular, I want to thank you for adopting the principle that awards should prioritize equity, lived experience, and community leadership as scoring criteria.

The innovation is not neutral. If equity and lived experience aren't explicitly prioritized, funding patterns will default back to systems that already hold power, and communities that are experiencing these disparities – they get left out again.

So, I wanted to say that BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities are already being targeted and harmed in real time. California has an obligation to be explicit and courageous, so, if the funding does not specifically prioritize and reach these communities, the disparities do not get reduced. So, my request is that we approve the IPF Framework as developed through the public process, and reject or table the last-minute 20 percent carve-out proposal, unless it goes through a transparent process with real stakeholder input and clear equity outcomes. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sarahi Soto-Talavera (attended in person) stated: Hi, my name is Sarahi Soto-Talavera, she/her pronouns. I'm a second-year MSW student at UC Berkeley, and I'm an intern with Safe Passages. My comment is regarding Slides 8 and 9, the nuts and bolts of scoring. So, I'm here to urge you all to please reconsider specifically and explicitly prioritizing BIPOC and LGBTQ communities, as many stakeholders have been advocating for. I know the Commission's response to this feedback was that these communities are already encompassed in the populations that are outlined in the framework, but I do want to remind the Commission that, during the development of Prop 63, the same belief was promoted, and this resulted in the MHSA having a difficult time reducing disparities for BIPOC communities, and very little funding was allocated for CBOs that specialize in serving specific racial and ethnic communities. So, I want to urge y'all to please not make the same mistake again.

If programs don't specifically call out BIPOC or LGBTQ communities, they will not be served in the proportion that they need or deserve in order to reduce disparities. And as you all know, we're living in a very historic moment right now, where the trans and BIPOC communities are under direct attacks from the federal administration and the racist and transphobic ideology. And these attacks are trauma-inducing, not only for the individuals, their families, the communities, and even future generations, and it even impacts children's brain development and their development as they grow up.

And so, the unwillingness to call out these specific populations is the root cause for the ongoing disparities, and these disparities are going to continue to widen as the federal administration is doing what they're doing, and so right now really is the time to rise up and support these communities. And so, I don't want to see these communities left behind, and so I really urge – (Two-minute time limit was reached.)

Stacie Hiramoto (attended in person) stated: Stacie Hiramoto, REMHDCO, the Racial and Ethnic Mental Health Disparities Coalition, and also for the CRDP. Now you can see why I am so impressed with my interns. I will not repeat, but I do support the principles and what they have said. So, I'm going to sort of back up, because I know I really believe that we should wait on that carve-out for the 20 percent. And, I just feel that it may not be a bad idea, but I do not feel that it has been vetted. And the money is needed now. And I really think we should consider it, but not for this round. I think there are just too many questions, and it's very confusing.

And if you look at the proposal, they make some assertions that are critical of both the Commission and the community stakeholders, as well as the process for deciding how this innovation partnership should be spent. For instance, the paper asserts that there have been no academic expert or actual consumer input characterizing public engagement to date as coming from CBOs only. Things like this and, again, the process. So again, that, I want to put aside.

The other thing I want you to do is think about – I really appreciate some of the things that Commissioner Mitchell said, Commissioner Fairweather, and Fernandez, because of the community, I think you're coming from our community-based perspective. Having a good relationship with the county is not easy. One of the reasons the CRDP was so successful is because it did not involve the county, sadly. And if you look, most of those individual projects have tried to make a good relationship with their counties and have not been able to. So, anyway, thank you.

Danny Thirakul (attended in person) stated: Good morning. My name is Danny Thirakul. Pronouns he/him/his. I serve as Public Policy Coordinator with Mental Health America of California. I wanted to thank the Commission, and especially staff for their work on this IPF Framework. Welfare Institution Code 5845.1 authorizes the Commission to administer this grant program to promote the development of innovative mental health and substance use disorder programs and practices for our most underserved and low-income populations. This includes those experiencing chronic homelessness, those who are justice involved, and even our youth in the child welfare system.

We are pleased to see how this Innovation Partnership Fund has developed over the various listening sessions and Committee meetings. I would like to emphasize that this Commission should use all available funds to support these programs and practices that directly serve people without reserving a portion of the funds for Commission activities. Thank you.

Joel Baum (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Thank you so much. Joel Baum, he/him. I'm with Safe Passages, as well, one of the CRDP organizations. I very much applaud the comments of Ash and Sarahi and Stacie and don't want to reiterate them. I do want to emphasize my concern, however, for the process by which this particular proposal around the carve-out has been raised. It feels very last-minute. While I

acknowledge there has been some discussions about the need for investment and innovations in how we use money and raise money and continue to do sustainability, I feel like this has been sort of an eleventh-hour placement. I think 20 percent of the funding going towards that is irresponsible, given the previous comments about the need for services, and so I'm very much concerned about that and strongly want to encourage the Commission to hold off on funding that portion.

The other piece I want to emphasize is in the proposals for the RFP, there's conversation about needing to privilege organizations that have worked with ethnic and LGBT populations previously, but far too often doing so has simply said, "we acknowledge they exist," or "we have worked with these populations, we promise," without very clear parameters and data about how that is actually demonstrated and its effectiveness. The commitment to work with marginalized communities – it can't be in name only; it must be shown in a measurable way that any applicant, whoever they are, have demonstrated success. So, thank you.

Jason Robison (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Hi, everybody, thank you. Commissioners, thank you. Jason Robison, I'm with SHARE!, the Self-Help and Recovery Exchange, in Los Angeles, the California Association of Mental Health Peer-Run Organizations. I'm also a member of the Client, Family, Community Inclusion, Lived Experience, and Diversity Advisory Committee. And I want to emphasize the importance of the stakeholder process. And, if there's a way to allow the RFP to allow applicants to demonstrate that a community process and stakeholder input has been included, I think that would be very important.

I heard a governmental representative from Greenland use the slogan "nothing about us without us" in response to NATO negotiating over the future of Greenland without Greenlanders. So, that slogan that is so essential to innovation, Mental Health Services Act, make sure that nothing about us without us is part of this process.

And also, I strongly recommend flexibility in the process, as many people have said. Some counties just have great difficulty in being able to bureaucratically support partnerships with small community-based organizations, especially those they don't necessarily have existing contracts with. So, while that can be encouraged, I would also hope that projects that demonstrate a clear need outside the existing scope of what the county offers through community-based organizations, that there are strong areas for scoring for those projects as well. Thank you.

Laurel Benhamida, Ph.D. (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Good morning again. This is Laurel Benhamida. Same organizations as earlier. I want to speak about the last-minute 20 percent carve-out. I think we've all learned, if we didn't know a few weeks ago, the government is not inherently any more trustworthy than the private sector. And, if the SAMHSA debacle – that turnaround last week – didn't convince people, well, I don't think anything can. But the 20 percent carve-out is premature.

Trust has not been built by its proponents with Commissioners, staff, and public, who have not been trained or even discussed what are the options that have existed, and what have the outcomes have been with previous private-public partnerships. So, I would agree with Stacie and with Chairman Rowlett that it's something that needs to be

considered, but premature at this time. So, discuss it, but certainly don't implement it. Thank you.

Josefina Alvarado Mena (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Thank you so much for the opportunity to get public comment today. I wanted to, again, speak to the proposal for the 20 percent carve-out, and I wanted to talk a little bit about the public input into the framework. So, this process has been open to the public at large over many, many months. All sectors in California have the same invitation. Hundreds of stakeholders have showed up to express their opinion, share their expertise and lived experience over the many months the process has unfolded. Scholars, researchers, leaders, family members, and individuals with lived experience have showed up to make public comment.

Now, this proposal questions the legitimacy of public voice and the testimony of everyone who bothered to take the time to show up to a meeting to share their voice. And that in itself is contrary to the spirit of public engagement. It is very important that this money is strategically invested, and the spirit of the funding is meant to be innovation. But that innovation cannot come at the cost of public input. These are public dollars. And we are in a time where there are not just competing priorities, but there's a need to triage those priorities. And, as you've heard, many, many people talked over many, many months about how communities of color and LGBTQ+ communities are suffering under this new administration.

And now is the time for California and California's leaders to continue to step up and create a buffer for these communities if they are to avoid erasure. So, I would really encourage the Commission to adopt the framework, not allocate a 20 percent carve-out at this time without the benefit of a more intensive and transparent public input process. Thank you.

Michelle (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: My name is Michelle and I work with Care Connection Transportation Services. And I just wanted to highlight what Commissioner Brown was mentioning about the ABC article and the Golden Gate Bridge. We actually come from the same county and we have a significant need. We're not universal with most other counties in California. I recently sat in on a NAMI webinar, and a lot of our funding can be allocated to actually make a difference in mental and behavioral health services, but I just want to note what you guys are doing. I think it's awesome – this innovation, wanting to come up with new plans, and how can we really fix what hasn't been working. But I agree with Commissioner Brown, and it shouldn't be an individual disbursement of these funds. It really should be let's look at everybody and have an earmark and portion it out properly. That's all I wanted to say. Thank you.

Monica Zuniga Fajuri (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Thank you again. Monica, working in Cultura y Bienestar, which is a mental health preventative program for the Latinx community under the umbrella of the CRDP. We are, as most of the CDEPs, now struggling in this new context of how we are going to continue funding our programs that have been very successful serving our community, and that's why I have been tied very closely to this Innovation Fund. I'm looking forward to it to see if I get some support from these funds to continue doing the work that we have been doing for more than 15 years in Alameda County, California.

And sorry that I'm going to repeat the same that I have heard from Joel, Stacie, Josefina, all who are here, that maybe 20 million a year for 5 years is already not enough, but taking 20 percent off the top of the Innovation Partnership Fund, actually, I don't think it's going to be helpful for us, because it's already not enough money. So, thinking of getting maybe less than that to support our programs is not going to help to reduce disparities or truly support underserved communities. So, we are already facing a lot of serious attacks at the federal level, and this is not time to reduce investments in innovation that definitely is going to serve us. So, really, I will ask the Commission to really be bold and explicit in giving priority to organizations that are led by and serve BIPOC and LGBTQ communities directly. Thank you.

Dr. Von Simmons (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Good morning, everyone. My name is Dr. Von Simmons. I'm with the California Black Women's Health Project and I wanted to just express deep concern about the 20 percent carve-out of behavioral health funds. I do feel like it's kind of at the eleventh hour, given the lack of transparency and stakeholder engagement. I do feel like it's a large decision, and decisions of this magnitude, especially made very late in the process, I believe it risks destabilizing the existing programs, especially the amount of trust that has been built so far and could potentially disproportionately harm communities that the funds are meant to support for the most part.

So, I also wanted to just bring attention again to the fact that there does not seem to be any prioritization for protecting BIPOC and LGBTQ communities specifically, especially given what's going on in our current administration. These communities experience well-documented and very persistent disparities and behavioral health access, quality care, and these are often rooted in structural racism, discrimination, and historical underinvestment.

So, just wanted to kind of call forth that again. Universal or one-size-fits-all approaches typically do not work for these communities, and they don't address the inequities as well. So, without being very intentional and protected and really being mindful of culturally specific funding disparities, these differences will continue on. So, I just wanted to call attention to that. Equity does mean more than inclusion. It means having a targeted investment, shared decision-making, and also accountability. So, thank you so much for this opportunity.

John Alita (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: All right, thank you all. My colleagues have said it very well. I'm not going to use my time to echo their opinions; I agree with all of them. I'm just going to tell you, here's my case study. I run a very small nonprofit about an hour away from you in San Joaquin County for the LGBTQ community. We're the only community organization that's doing anything to support substance use disorder or mental health in the LGBTQ community. In the last 9 months I've been in this job, I've learned as much as I can about these various programs. I have my county telling me that they're not going to have much money left to give out, and that's not going to be done until July, when my organization is likely to run out of funding.

I'm also being told by caseworkers at the county that they're not even doing groups that are focused on LGBT or Black or Latino or even transitional-aged youth. And then, I come to this panel and hear about a sort of last-minute carve-out which concerns me.

The purpose of these funds is to try to make our mental health and our behavioral health better for all of our residents. I think that our LGBTQ, our BIPOC, and many other marginalized groups are suffering equally, if not more, than others, with our high rates of drug addiction and et cetera. I'm not going to go into that.

All I'm telling you is, this is where a small nonprofit leader finds himself at this point in time, struggling to help a community. So, whatever way you work out your programs, I just need you to understand that I didn't think the intention of the BHSA was to close down CBOs, or not support us, but I am beginning to feel like that's the unintended impact on my organization. I do hope we will be able to continue, I do hope we'll be able to be eligible for some of these funds, and I hope that our voices are not lost in this larger planning. Thank you.

Lueni Masina (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Thank you, Commissioners. My name is Lueni Masina, and I am speaking on behalf of the California Reducing Disparities Project, representing the Essence of MANA Program, the only CDEP that serves and targets the Pacific Islander population. So, first of all, I would like to start off by saying thank you to the Commissioners. Over the past several months, we've truly felt heard, and we've seen the community feedback reflected in the framework.

And so, I would like to use my time today just echoing the many folks before me, and I say this as both a service provider and as a concerned community member about the proposal to take the 20 percent carve-out. Funds are already limited as it is, especially for our LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC communities. And I know y'all are exhausted, we're exhausted, especially being at all of these meetings, and you hearing it over and over again. And so, I just want to humbly ask that you stay rooted in the values that have led this hard work, and help us and support us in continuing that. And so, thank you.

Alberto Perez Rendon (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Good afternoon. My name is Alberto Perez. I work in La Clinica de la Raza in Oakland. I'm the program manager for Cultura y Bienestar, also part of the CRDP family. And first, I want to thank all of you Commissioners. It's been a lot of work. I know it's been months in the making, and I really appreciate the process, and I know we didn't get everything we wanted, each and every one of us, but there was a process, and I really think that was really valuable, that you took the time to listen to us and to incorporate as much feedback as you could. It's really great.

And with that said, I also want to second what others have to say in terms of the last-minute carve-out of 20 percent of this fund. I don't think it's a good idea, so I want you to oppose it. I want it not to be part of this process at this point. I don't think it has had enough community input. I also think that, when I read it, it seems very vague in terms of how it is expected for this 20 percent carve-out to turn into additional funding. And so, because of that, I don't think it's a good time to put it forward at this time, so I wanted to reiterate that as others have. And that's my comment. Thank you so much.

Noemi Tungui (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Good afternoon. Buenas tardes, Commission. My name is Noemi Tungui. I'm an Indigenous migrant non-binary person residing on Chumash lands in Ventura County. I work for Mixteco/Indigena Community Organizing Project, serving alongside my community. And I'm also with the CRDP. I just want to thank you for the democratic process that this Commission has created for the

Innovation Partnership Fund, an opportunity to be heard during this Commission. While the promotoras here are hearing stories from migrant Indigenous people of raids and their families being detained, I'm here providing a listening ear, making sure that we're being heard and served in our community.

I'm really concerned about any funding going to for-profit or private agencies because I do feel it's a gamble of where it'll be invested and that it'll reach back out directly to our gender-expansive BIPOC communities. I agree with Vice Chair Chambers on the concerns and caution about making the big investments to for-profit companies and that those same companies might charge us, and we might indirectly be creating bigger disparities in behavioral health.

In the words of Vice Chair Chambers, let's work for the good of the people, not the private. So, it's only natural and logical that I do not support the proposal to take 20 percent – the carve-out of the five-year total Innovation Partnership Funds. For this, I did read the language and it seemed very much surprising to me as someone who has been attending these meetings. So, I just thank you for listening to us, and really showing that in the final language and framework. Thank you.

Anastacio Flores, Jr. (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Hello, my name is Anastacio Flores. I'm with Asian American Recovery Services – HealthRIGHT 360 and also with the CRDP. Our CDEP serves Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders in San Mateo and San Francisco Counties. And thank you for this opportunity. I agree with the speakers before me: Stacie, Joel, Josefina, and Lueni, and others. I'd like to thank the Commission and Commission staff, too, for really working hard to listen to and work with the community stakeholders. We've been blessed to have received funding from our county and the state, but it wasn't until CRDP that we have moved the needle in serving the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander community in San Mateo.

We have been able to build capacity, collect data, built trust and relationships with the community leaders and members that have allowed us to reach those in need of behavioral services. We believe the Commission should be explicit in prioritizing organizations run by and serving BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities, which were significantly underrepresented in the original innovation projects, despite the program being well-suited to fund CDEPs.

At a time when the communities are being singled out and targeted by the federal government, California must stand firm and ensure they are clearly prioritized, effectively served, and actively protected. Thank you for this opportunity.

Richard Zaldivar (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Good afternoon, members of the Commission. Richard Zaldivar, Executive Director of The Wall Las Memorias, and we provide services here in Los Angeles, funded by SAPC, LA County, and the LA County Mental Health Department. And I'm not going to reiterate many of the comments that we've heard before, but I'm here just to strongly oppose the 20 percent carve-out, and ask the Commissioners to consider that, and maybe revisit that later down the year. I think this is really important for all of our communities, especially those communities of color and our LGBTQ community. Thank you so much.

Kim Stafford (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Hi, this is Kim Stafford. I'm just speaking as an individual. I agree with the comments about holding off on the 20 percent carve-out. And my other comment would be you don't just keep throwing money at profit-making entities, and you identify the most high-risk organizations or the most high-risk populations and you fund those. And also, the other thing is, in all streams of funding, you have to be measuring specific outcomes of programs. Who's being served.

So, just be really careful of where you're putting all your money. I agree with the previous speakers. When you give a lot of money, where you target these populations, you also have to make sure that they can then be able to stand alone. And oftentimes they may not be able to. So, anyway, I hope you understand what I'm trying to say. Thank you.

Commissioner Discussion

Chair Rowlett laid out the options available to Commissioners as follows:

1. Approve a vote as-is for all the IPF dollars and no further discussion around sustainable finance.
2. Approve a vote for all the IPF dollars and grants and to continue the discussion of the sustainable finance idea at the next round of \$20 million in the Advisory Committees.
3. Amend the proposed motion with a 20 percent set-aside of \$4 million, leaving \$16 million for the IPF grants, to be sent to the Advisory Committees for further discussion.

Chief Counsel Gallardo clarified that Option 1 is the original motion as listed in the meeting materials. Option 3 is Commissioner Carnevale's proposal as outlined in his concept paper, which was included in the meeting materials.

Commissioner Tsai added that the proposed motion encompasses both Options 1 and 2. Approving Option 1 does not prevent discussion about the sustainable finance idea for the next spending cycle.

Commissioner Contreras asked if the Option 3 set-aside is allowed, when it would not be tied back to a target population. He noted that that is not how the use of these funds was intended.

Executive Director Grealish stated "carve-out" may not be the best term. The idea is to pause 20 percent of funding to allow for additional discussion.

Commissioner Brown made a motion to approve Option 3 and suggested that the terms "carve-out" and "set-aside" be changed to "partition." He suggested partitioning 20 percent of the funding for further discussion on leveraging or matching other sources of funding.

Commissioner Gordon seconded.

Chief Counsel Gallardo stated for the record that Commissioner Brown's motion was to amend the original motion to change the \$20 million to \$16 million and to partition \$4 million of the IPF for this fiscal year for further analysis.

Commissioner Mitchell asked how the \$4 million would be used.

Chief Counsel Gallardo stated the Advisory Committees will discuss sustainable funding options, as outlined in Commissioner Carnevale's proposal.

Commissioner Gordon stated there has not been sufficient discussion on the partition for Commissioners to fully understand its potential benefits. He asked about the timeline for this discussion.

Chair Rowlett stated the Program Advisory Committee (PAC) and Budget and Fiscal Advisory Committee (BFA) will meet in February and April.

Commissioner Tsai agreed with Commissioner Gordon that this amendment feels rushed and comments heard today from the community express a similar sentiment. He stated he has more questions than answers after reviewing the proposal. He questioned partitioning out 20 percent of funding that has already been discussed with the community.

Commissioner Bontrager disagreed, stating partitioning out the 20 percent for further consideration and analysis will effectively slow the process down. It is a more thoughtful approach.

Commissioner Madrigal-Weiss stated today is the first time some Commissioners have seen Commissioner Carnevale's proposal. She suggested approving Option 1 today. This would give more time to have a thoughtful planning discussion for a possible partition of funding in the future.

Public Comment on Amended Motion

Ash Wilhelm (attended in person) stated: Hi, again. Ash Wilhelm. I just wanted to thank the Commission for honoring the voices of the community. And that is all. Thank you.

Stacie Hiramoto (attended in person) stated: Stacie Hiramoto, REMHDCO. I'm just disappointed. The community has spoken to me and there have been times when -- and I know we can't win every time, but it takes a lot for them to come. And then, when it feels like their voices are just disregarded because, again, I'm very confused about the motion. I don't know why this has to be done so fast when it could be put off until next year. I really feel that, for many of us, and I think many of the Commissioners, too, to understand the proposal, it's going to take more than just one quick meeting. Anyway, thank you.

Joel Baum (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Thank you so much. Yes, we have heard loud and clear from those individuals who've taken time out of their lives, like all of you have, of course, to make their comments about this. And I think it was loud and clear that the proposal from Commissioner Carnevale, which we are now talking about carving out money to make happen, was vague, was rushed, and was certainly, I'm guessing, would not be approved were it an RFP before this Commission. It has very little detail.

And so, to hear Commissioner Gordon say why can't we just approve it concerns me even more greatly. I'm super concerned. You've heard loud and clear from the community that this is rushed, that this is not ready, take another bat next year, but to take the \$4 million right now seems premature and irresponsible. I'm sorry, I can't say it

any other way. I do appreciate the depth of conversation, but, come on, you would not approve this proposal were it sitting before you in an RFP.

Laurel Benhamida, Ph.D. (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: This is Laurel Benhamida, again. I guess I would say trust, trust, trust. You've built a lot of trust in the last year, when trust had been lost previously. You risk losing trust now – by accepting this proposal and implementing it now. Build trust.

The people who want this 20 percent carve-out need to take their time – do their homework in terms of building the trust with stakeholders over the next year, if they can. Okay? But to reward this kind of late book report with exactly what is asked will not build trust. That's my conclusion. Thank you.

Noemi Tungui (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Noemi from MICOP. I would say I'm frustrated about this last-minute motion. To be frank, I see older white men who are voting on this. They're not the priority population. They don't have to go through what our communities are facing every single day and now I have to go back to my community and let them know that the few funds that we're already fighting for are now being reduced. And it's just painful, honestly, because we're taking time away from cases to be here today. It feels very unprofessional for this Commission to be making such a vote. So, yeah, just disappointed in you and in the folks who are not speaking up about this in this Commission. You're sitting here for a reason. Use your voice. Use your power. Thank you.

Kim Stafford (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: I'm curious on how many members of this Commission have even read through the report and understand that they've received your information and been able to fully understand the implementation of this. That concerns me a little bit. I don't even know that the Commission members are super clear on this and I guess that concerns me, and that's all I'm going to say. Thank you, and thank you, everybody, for your service.

Lueni Masina (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: I would just like to echo everyone that has gone before me. Once again, I'm urging the Commission to please, please reconsider the reduction of innovation funds. This just shifts resources away from our very communities that have, once again, been pushed to the side for many, many years. And so, please do reconsider and think about the long-lasting consequences of this choice of our communities. Thank you.

Commissioner Discussion

Chair Rowlett stated appreciation to the members of the public for their candor and their ability to give their comments in a respectful manner. That is what public service is all about. While there are many perspectives, all viewpoints have strengths.

Commissioner Brown stated, if these monies are partitioned off for subsequent discussion in more depth and if it were not adopted in the future, the funding would go back into the pot to be part of the RFP process. He stated, without the partition, there will be no funding this year for sustainable finance.

Action: Chair Rowlett stated Commissioner Brown made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Gordon, that:

- *The Commission approves the Innovation Partnership Fund grant procurement outline plan not to exceed \$16 million and authorizes the Executive Director to conduct the competitive solicitation, issue a Notice of Intent to Award to the highest-ranked proposer(s), and execute all resulting grant agreements in accordance with the approved outline plan and applicable procurement laws. The Commission would partition \$4 million of this coming fiscal year's funding for further analysis by the PAC and BFA Committees to come back to the Commission for full review.*

Motion failed. 6 voted yes, 14 voted no, and 0 abstained, per roll call vote as follows:

The following Commissioners voted "Yes": Commissioners Bontrager, Brown, Callan, Gordon, and Thomas-Beckett, and Chair Rowlett.

The following Commissioners voted "No": Commissioners Bunch, Contreras, Senate Designee Swartz, Cross, Fairweather, Fernandez, Assembly Designee Pulmano, Larsen, Madrigal-Weiss, Mitchell, Southard, Tsai, and Wilkes, and Vice Chair Chambers.

Action: Chair Rowlett asked for a motion to approve the IPF grant outline. Assembly Designee Pulmano made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Madrigal-Weiss, that:

- *The Commission approves the Innovation Partnership Fund grant procurement outline plan not to exceed \$20 million and authorizes the Executive Director to conduct the competitive solicitation, issue a Notice of Intent to Award to the highest-ranked proposer(s), and execute all resulting grant agreements in accordance with the approved outline plan and applicable procurement laws.*

Motion passed. 13 voted yes, 2 voted no, and 5 abstained, per roll call vote as follows:

The following Commissioners voted "Yes": Commissioners Bunch, Contreras, Senate Designee Swartz, Cross, Fairweather, Fernandez, Gordon, Assembly Designee Pulmano, Larsen, Madrigal-Weiss, Mitchell, Tsai, and Wilkes.

The following Commissioners voted "No": Commissioners Brown and Southard.

The following Commissioners abstained: Commissioners Bontrager, Callan, and Thomas-Beckett, Vice Chair Chambers, and Chair Rowlett.

[Note: Agenda Item 9 was taken out of order and was heard after Agenda Item 11.]

9: Behavioral Health Student Services Act Administrative and Evaluation Funds – Action

Chair Rowlett stated the Commission will review and consider proposed expenditures of administrative and evaluation funds.

Commissioners Gordon and Madrigal-Weiss recused themselves from the discussion and decision-making with regard to this agenda item pursuant to Commission policy.

Chair Rowlett asked staff to present this agenda item.

Acting Deputy Director Martin-Mollard provided an overview, with a slide presentation, of the goals, considerations for BHSSA administrative and evaluation funds, and next steps. She stated the staff recommendation is to encumber remaining funds to support grant management software, additional technical assistance in the form of statewide suicide prevention training, and substance use disorder (SUD) pilots for youth who are justice-involved and at risk of school failure, and to establish a School Behavioral Health Performance Management System.

Commissioner Comments & Questions

Commissioner Larsen stated only half of the school districts have adopted the all-payer fee schedule to ensure that K-12 students have access to behavioral health services on campus. She asked if the PAC Committee discussed expanding that to all school districts to ensure sustainable funding for K-12 services.

Executive Director Grealish stated DHCS works with Medi-Cal Managed Care Plans, commercial plans, and the schools under the CYBHI. The Commission works with populations with the highest need who are served by the county behavioral health system.

Commissioner Larsen stated she is in favor of focusing resources on priority populations but, during the transition from the MHSA to the BHSA, providing technical assistance to ensure that everyone receives the services that they need, especially with this funding stream, is what was intended.

Vice Chair Chambers stated concern about dropping children off plans when they are not as sick.

Executive Director Grealish stated the point with the all-payer fee schedule is that children will receive the behavioral health services they need no matter what.

Commissioner Bunch cautioned that there will be gaps in that system and disconnects between what is seen on paper and what is happening in practice.

Assembly Designee Pulmano stated, regarding the SUD services integration, rural communities are suffering and have a higher rate of opioid-related deaths. Staff needs to be cognizant of that when looking at who and what is being funded.

Assembly Designee Pulmano stated the need to include rural communities, rural LEAs, or a partnership of rural LEAs to be part of the evaluation.

Senate Designee Swartz stated this project was a legislative initiative. It was in competition to the fee schedule and that whole project. The Legislature felt this was a more effective way to spend the money and it was a lot less money. She stated the hope that this evaluation shows that this approach is more effective. She noted that this project has nothing to do with the health plans.

Commissioner Discussion

Action: Chair Rowlett asked for a motion to approve the procurement of grant management software for an estimated amount of \$200,000 in BHSSA administrative funds. Assembly Designee Pulmano made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Cross, that:

- *The Commission approves the procurement of grant management software for an estimated amount of \$200,000 in BHSSA administrative funds.*

Motion passed. 19 voted yes, 0 voted no, and 2 abstained, per roll call vote as follows:

The following Commissioners voted “Yes”: Commissioners Bontrager, Brown, Bunch, Callan, Contreras, Senate Designee Swartz, Cross, Fairweather, Fernandez, Assembly Designee Pulmano, Larsen, Mitchell, Robinson, Southard, Thomas-Beckett, Tsai, and Wilkes, Vice Chair Chambers, and Chair Rowlett.

The following Commissioners recused themselves from the vote and were absent from the room: Commissioners Gordon and Madrigal-Weiss.

Action: Chair Rowlett asked for a motion to approve amending the BHSSA TA provider (Center for Applied Research Solutions) contract (contract #24MHSOAC061) to provide an additional \$1.5 million in BHSSA administrative funds for technical assistance for suicide prevention training. Senate Designee Swartz made a motion, seconded by Assembly Designee Pulmano, that:

- *The Commission approves amending the BHSSA TA provider (Center for Applied Research Solutions) contract (contract #24MHSOAC061) to provide an additional \$1.5 million in BHSSA administrative funds for technical assistance for suicide prevention training.*

Motion passed. 19 voted yes, 0 voted no, and 2 abstained, per roll call vote as follows:

The following Commissioners voted “Yes”: Commissioners Bontrager, Brown, Bunch, Callan, Contreras, Senate Designee Swartz, Cross, Fairweather, Fernandez, Assembly Designee Pulmano, Larsen, Mitchell, Robinson, Southard, Thomas-Beckett, Tsai, and Wilkes, Vice Chair Chambers, and Chair Rowlett.

The following Commissioners recused themselves from the vote and were absent from the room: Commissioners Gordon and Madrigal-Weiss.

Action: Chair Rowlett asked for a motion to approve the disbursement of \$3.6 million in BHSSA administrative funds for substance use disorder services integration pilots through grant amendments, based on grantee capacity and interest. Assembly Designee Pulmano made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Cross, that:

- *The Commission approves the disbursement of \$3.6 million in BHSSA administrative funds for substance use disorder services integration pilots through grant amendments, based on grantee capacity and interest.*

Motion passed. 19 voted yes, 0 voted no, and 2 abstained, per roll call vote as follows:

The following Commissioners voted “Yes”: Commissioners Bontrager, Brown, Bunch, Callan, Contreras, Senate Designee Swartz, Cross, Fairweather, Fernandez, Assembly Designee Pulmano, Larsen, Mitchell, Robinson, Southard, Thomas-Beckett, Tsai, and Wilkes, Vice Chair Chambers, and Chair Rowlett.

The following Commissioners recused themselves from the vote and were absent from the room: Commissioners Gordon and Madrigal-Weiss.

Action: Chair Rowlett asked for a motion to approve the BHSSA procurement outline plan for school behavioral health performance management systems not to exceed \$9 million in evaluation funds, and authorize the Executive Director to conduct the competitive solicitation, issue a Notice of Intent to Award to the highest-ranked proposer(s), and execute all resulting contract grants and agreements in accordance with the approved outline plan and applicable procurement laws. Commissioner Callan made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Fairweather, that:

- *The Commission approves the BHSSA procurement outline plan for school behavioral health performance management systems not to exceed \$9 million in evaluation funds, and authorizes the Executive Director to conduct the competitive solicitation, issue a Notice of Intent to Award to the highest-ranked proposer(s), and execute all resulting contract and grant agreements in accordance with the approved outline plan and applicable procurement laws.*

Motion passed. 15 voted yes, 1 voted no, and 4 abstained, per roll call vote as follows:

The following Commissioners voted “Yes”: Commissioners Brown, Bunch, Callan, Contreras, Cross, Fairweather, Fernandez, Larsen, Mitchell, Robinson, Southard, Thomas-Beckett, and Wilkes, Vice Chair Chambers, and Chair Rowlett.

The following Commissioner voted “No”: Commissioner Bontrager.

The following Commissioners abstained: Assembly Designee Pulmano, and Senate Designee Swartz.

The following Commissioners recused themselves from the vote and were absent from the room: Commissioners Gordon and Madrigal-Weiss.

Commissioners Gordon and Madrigal-Weiss rejoined the meeting.

10: Lunch and Closed Session – Personnel Matter – Action

Chair Rowlett stated Commissioners will enter closed session to discuss the Executive Director evaluation process and general Commission personnel matters per California Government Code § 11126 (a).

The Commission entered into closed session at 12:49 p.m.

11: Re-establish Quorum and Report Back from Closed Session – Action

The Commission reconvened into open session at 1:49 p.m. and reestablished quorum.

Chair Rowlett stated no action was taken during closed session.

There were no questions from Commissioners and no public comment.

12: Mental Health Wellness Act Peer Respite Grant Outline – Action

Chair Rowlett stated the Commission will review and consider approval of the RFP outline for the Mental Health Wellness Act Peer Respite grant project. He stated the CFC Committee discussed this at its December 17, 2025, meeting. The CFC Committee is a temporary combination of the Client and Family Leadership Committee (CFLC) and the Cultural and Linguistic Competency Committee (CLCC). He asked staff to present this agenda item.

Courtney Ackerman, Research Scientist, Research, Evaluation, and Program Operations Division, provided an overview, with a slide presentation of the goals, MHWA funds, funding priorities, peer respite project, and funding outline. She stated barriers to establishing peer respites include a lack of sustainable funding, an absence of partnerships, and a lack of knowledge and guidance to work in partnership on operating a peer respite. Phase 1 will include a pilot program learning collaborative, technical assistance, and evaluation. She stated the PAC and CFC Committees have considered this proposal in December and recommended that the full Commission adopt it.

Vice Chair Chambers stated the CFC Committee met in December and heard the presentation on the ways the Commission can invest in the Mental Health Wellness Fund and promote and expand the peer respite model. During this presentation, Commission staff gave an overview of the Mental Health Wellness Fund funding priorities and shared the peer respite outline, which proposes two phases – building capacity and implementation. Public comment at the CFC Committee meeting strongly supported moving forward with this proposal, and the Committee voted in favor of moving the peer respite project outline to this full Commission. She thanked staff for their hard work and dedication on this project. She stated she looks forward to the discussion with fellow Commissioners.

Commissioner Comments & Questions

Chair Rowlett asked how the learnings would differ by participating in a collaborative over what has already been learned about peer respite.

Ms. Ackerman stated learnings include that peer respites succeed when there are strong policies and procedures, and that there are available experts in peer respite who have the knowledge, resources, and tools. The learning collaborative would provide them with a forum to share their expertise.

Assembly Designee Pulmano asked how peer respite interacts with the housing continuum.

Ms. Ackerman stated one of the linkages that most peer respites can provide is to longer-term housing, because peer respite is only up to 30 days.

Assembly Designee Pulmano asked if peer respite is a Medi-Cal allowable benefit.

Ms. Ackerman stated peer respite is an allowable setting to pay transitional rent.

Commissioner Fernandez stated peer respite is not a Medi-Cal benefit on its own. Peer respites are under community supports. There are three potential community support benefits where peer respite could qualify.

Assembly Designee Pulmano asked what the evaluation is envisioned to be and what data would be collected, such as linkage to housing. She stated the assumption that peer respite organizations will collect the information.

Ms. Ackerman stated the evaluation would focus on the outcomes that are hoped to be seen from a peer respite, including increasing confidence in peer-run organizations and in the ability for county partnerships to establish a peer respite, verifying that peer respites are being established and sustained, and producing linkages to lower levels of care and housing.

Assembly Designee Pulmano requested a presentation on the parameters of the evaluation at a future Commission meeting, if the \$20 million is approved today. She noted that that \$20 million was hard fought last year in the Legislature. She stated the need to ensure that that funding will be spent as intended with the necessary data and evaluation.

Ms. Ackerman stated there are no plans to come back to the Commission with an evaluation plan. She stated staff has discussed doing the evaluation in-house or wrapping the evaluation up in the RFP with the technical assistance provider. It likely will be a mix of the two.

Commissioner Fairweather stated peer respites could help those who have been moved from transitional supportive housing to permanent supportive housing maintain their housing. She stated, if they have behavioral health issues that might risk eviction, they could go to a peer respite, get stabilized, and then come back to permanent supportive housing.

Ms. Ackerman agreed.

Commissioner Robinson asked about the issue of peer-run organizations not yet having the capacity to bill for Medi-Cal.

Ms. Ackerman stated building that capacity is a complicated process. It is something the technical assistance provider can help provide.

Vice Chair Chambers stated Alameda County lost funding for two of its three peer-run organizations because they did not have the capacity to bill Medi-Cal. She stated the need to standardize the Medi-Cal codes, incentivize commercial plans to find Medi-Cal codes that can be used, and provide additional technical assistance money to help peer respites.

Commissioner Robinson asked if it is a knowledge gap.

Chair Rowlett stated it is about billing Medi-Cal more efficiently and having blended funding that offsets the expenses associated with running a peer-run program.

Public Comment

Stacie Hiramoto (attended in person) stated: Stacie, here. REMHDCO. I just really want to support the motion, as REMHDCO really supports peer-run organizations and peer-

run programs. On a side note, I really wish the Commission or another body would do something on the Medi-Cal question, because that is so -- this reminds me very much of many of the organizations that I work with or represent and this whole move to Prop 1, where we split PEI, and they're told, oh, just become Medi-Cal eligible, or just bill Medi-Cal, as if it's easy. And it's very, very hard. And frankly, some providers don't want to become Medi-Cal providers.

So, it's a very good question, and I struggle myself since I'm not a direct service provider, but they have told me time and again, they've tried to explain how difficult it is to become a Medi-Cal provider, or to bill under Medi-Cal. So, but anyway, the main point is we do support this. Thank you.

Commissioner Discussion

Chair Rowlett stated peer-run organizations are effective. They ensure that individuals receiving services are able to obtain and utilize housing, and transition individuals away from the dependence on specialty behavioral health services. Peer-run organizations do this in a cost-effective, impactful way.

Action: Chair Rowlett asked for a motion to approve the Peer Respite procurement outline plan not to exceed \$20 million and authorize the Executive Director to conduct the competitive solicitation, issue a Notice of Intent to Award to the highest-ranked proposer(s), and execute all resulting contract and grant agreements in accordance with the approved outline plan and applicable procurement laws. Commissioner Madrigal-Weiss made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Bunch, that:

- *The Commission approve the Peer Respite procurement outline plan not to exceed \$20 million and authorizes the Executive Director to conduct the competitive solicitation, issue a Notice of Intent to Award to the highest-ranked proposer(s), and execute all resulting contract and grant agreements in accordance with the approved outline plan and applicable procurement laws.*

Motion passed. 15 voted yes, 0 voted no, and 4 abstained, per roll call vote as follows:

The following Commissioners voted "Yes": Commissioners Bunch, Callan, Contreras, Cross, Fairweather, Fernandez, Assembly Designee Pulmano, Larsen, Madrigal-Weiss, Mitchell, Robinson, Southard, Thomas-Beckett, and Wilkes, and Chair Rowlett.

The following Commissioners abstained: Commissioners Bontrager, Brown, and Senate Designee Swartz, and Vice Chair Chambers.

13: Stretch Break

Due to time constraints, no stretch break was taken.

Legislative and External Affairs Advisory Committee Update and Recommendations

14: 2026 Sponsored Legislation – Action

Chair Rowlett stated the Commission will review and consider legislation to sponsor in the 2026 legislative session. The Legislative and External Affairs Committee (LEX Committee), PAC Committee, and BFA Committee met in December to discuss this item and voted to move it to the Commission. He asked staff to present this agenda item.

Kendra Zoller, Deputy Director of Legislative and External Affairs, provided an overview, with a slide presentation, of the bill solicitation process, proposal for consideration, and decision-making framework for the proposed sustaining and supporting suicide prevention in school legislation. She stated the proposal has two main parts: developing free online suicide prevention training for students, teachers, and caregivers, and creating a statewide system to collect and analyze school suicide risk screening data. She stated this proposal is actionable, evidence-informed, and urgently needed.

Commissioner Madrigal-Weiss and Heather Nemour, Coordinator, Student Wellness and School Culture, San Diego Office of Education, continued the slide presentation and discussed the San Diego County Creating Opportunities in Preventing and Eliminating Suicide (COPES) Initiative and the effectiveness of evidence-based online training. They provided the example of the statewide LivingWorks Start program, an interactive online course that teaches individuals to recognize when someone has thoughts of suicide and take effective action to connect them with help.

Deputy Director Zoller stated important steps to ensure that this proposal is capable of being implemented include talking to the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and the California Department of Education (CDE), identifying BHSSA administrative funding that can help pay for the initiative, and reaching out to legislative staff who listened in on the last LEX Committee meeting. She stated the proposed initiative can build on existing online training platforms, such as Safe Spaces, that were developed by the Office of the California Surgeon General to make the training easy to access and cost-effective. Working together and using existing tools can ensure that students, families, and school staff across California get the support they need to save lives.

Commissioner Comments & Questions

Chair Rowlett stated the need for parents and caregivers to be supported and helped. Caregiving is the key to successful interventions. The absence of it, negatively affects that success.

Commissioner Fernandez asked for verification that this proposal is budget neutral and will not affect the General Fund.

Deputy Director Zoller stated the goal is not to have a fiscal impact so that it can pass the Legislature. Staff is still working on the data piece with the CDE.

Commissioner Bontrager asked if the strategy includes partnering with other online tools such as Soluna and Brightlife Kids.

Commissioner Madrigal-Weiss stated the CDE works closely with and promotes them.

Commissioner Brown stated a number of suicide-related bills have not passed. He asked why this proposal is expected to pass.

Deputy Director Zoller stated the Commission is funding the training piece. She stated the Commission has a Data Use Agreement with the CDE, which might be leveraged.

Public Comment

Danny Thirakul (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Good afternoon, now. My name's Danny Thirakul. Pronouns he/him. Public Policy Coordinator with Mental Health America of California, but also on behalf of the California Youth Empowerment Network, our TAY advocacy program. I just wanted to show our support for the proposed legislation, and we'll be happy to work with the Commission in furthering the legislation, if the Commission so chooses to move forward. Thank you.

Stacie Hiramoto (attended remotely via Zoom) stated: Stacie Hiramoto. REMHDCO, the Racial and Ethnic Mental Health Disparities Coalition. I just want to show support for this proposal. And, yes, I did bring concerns because the process was very good, but I think I just wanted the Commission and the Committee to understand what it looks like when you ask the community for a lot of the suggestions, which was wonderful, and people did do, what, 22? And then, when you come to the meeting, I mean, it wasn't like there was a robust discussion about alternatives to this proposal. We just saw the list of all the proposals, and then, at the next meeting, it was like, okay, here's the one.

And, again, I'm not trying to criticize this proposal. It would just help if there had been a little more information so the public understood why all the other ones were no good and this one was okay. Again, I know we're learning, so that was just a comment. But I do support this proposal, and just want to make sure that when you do the screening data, I noticed that they were not collecting information on sexual orientation and gender identity, which are very related to the risk of suicide. So, anyway. But thank you very much. And good luck.

Commissioner Discussion

Action: Chair Rowlett asked for a motion to approve sponsoring a bill for Sustaining and Supporting Suicide Prevention in Schools for the 2026 legislative session.

Commissioner Bunch made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Cross, that:

- *The Commission approve sponsoring a bill for Sustaining and Supporting Suicide Prevention in Schools for the 2026 legislative session.*

Motion passed 16 yes, 0 no, and 2 abstain, per roll call vote as follows:

The following Commissioners voted "Yes": Commissioners Bontrager, Brown, Bunch, Callan, Contreras, Cross, Fairweather, Fernandez, Larsen, Madrigal-Weiss, Mitchell, Robinson, Southard, and Wilkes, Vice Chair Chambers, and Chair Rowlett.

The following Commissioners abstained: Commissioners Assembly Designee Pulmano and Senate Designee Swartz.

Budget and Fiscal Advisory Committee Update and Recommendations

15: Innovation Partnership Fund Grant Outline – Information

Chair Rowlett stated the Commission will hear a presentation on the Governor's proposed 2026–27 State Budget. He asked staff to present this agenda item.

Lauren Quintero, Acting Deputy Director of Administrative Services and Performance Management, provided an overview, with a slide presentation, of the budget process timeline, Governor's proposed budget for fiscal year 2026-27, fiscal outlook, and Commission's proposed budget. She stated the Governor's proposed budget does not include new spending proposals but emphasizes continuing implementation of previous investments.

Acting Deputy Director Quintero stated allcove™ Youth Drop-In Centers reappropriation request was approved that extends the liquidation date until June 30, 2027, for up to \$4,062,000 of the remaining funds. This extension ensures that the allcove™ program can complete site development, staffing, and transition to sustainable funding sources. It also allows the Commission to complete the evaluation of the program and collect the necessary data on services and outcomes.

Commissioner Comments & Questions

Commissioner Madrigal-Weiss asked for more detail on the allcove™ Youth Drop-In Centers.

Acting Deputy Director Quintero stated the Commission directly funds four allcove™ sites. One is open, two have had soft openings, and one is still in the process of opening. They had challenges securing physical space, hiring and retaining staff, and navigating sustainability issues. Extending the timeframe for another year provides the opportunity for them to open. It also better aligns with the Stanford evaluation timeline.

Commissioner Madrigal-Weiss asked if allcove™ has sites that the Commission has not funded.

Executive Director Grealish stated the CYBHI funded additional sites that will come to an end on June 30, 2026.

Assembly Designee Pulmano stated five allcove™ centers are currently opened in Palo Alto, San Mateo, Redondo Beach, San Juan Capistrano, and Sacramento. Two allcove™ centers will be opening in March in Marysville and Castro Valley. One allcove™ center will be opening in June in Half Moon Bay. One allcove™ center will be opening in August in Watsonville. Two allcove™ centers will be opening in April or May in San Gabriel Valley and with the Yurok tribe.

Chair Rowlett stated the trademark allcove™ belongs to the Commission. He asked how the centers will be sustained and if the data points corroborate extending the allcove™ model. He stated it would be helpful to get more information about allcove™ and some of the preliminary data. He asked staff to provide an update including the important data points at a future Commission meeting.

Commissioner Larsen stated concern about making the mobile crisis benefit optional. She suggested that the Commission advocate for statewide, 24-7 mobile crisis teams.

Public Comment

Divya Shiv (attended in person) stated: Good afternoon. Apologies for keeping you here longer. My name is Divya Shiv, and I'm the Senior Policy Advocate of Behavioral Health at the California Alliance of Child and Family Services. I just want to second Commissioner Larson on the point about the proposed change to the Medi-Cal community-based mobile crisis services, as the January budget does eliminate this benefit and shift this benefit from a statewide mandatory benefit to a county optional benefit, which, similarly, as you addressed, Commissioner, we are really concerned that this will cause counties to stop providing this life-saving service as they are unable to bear the financial responsibility of the non-federal share of the Medi-Cal benefit cost. So, I just wanted to bring that up and second what the Commissioner already said.

And we are also gravely concerned about the impacts that H.R. 1 will cause for children and families, given that the governor's January budget largely maintains the status quo as it relates to H.R.1. and we are deeply concerned about how we as a state can ensure that Medi-Cal continues to provide these life-saving behavioral health services in the face of these devastating cuts. And we look forward to working with the Commission on addressing these challenges. Thank you so much.

Sarahi Soto-Talavera (attended in person) stated: Hi, everyone. Sarahi, again. She/her pronouns. I'm one of the interns with Safe Passages, which is one of the CRDP projects. I wanted to thank you all again for all the work that you do and for y'all's commitment to listening and implementing public feedback. It does not go unnoticed. This is just kind of like an FYI. I'll just keep it short.

So, we're going to be co-sponsoring a bill to continue to sustain funding for the CRDP. And the CRDP, for those that don't know, is the California Reducing Disparities Project, which is a project that consists of over 30 agencies and organizations across the state that specifically serve BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities. And so, we're really concerned that funding for the project is going to be cut, and we're really concerned about the impact that that could have. And so, we're hoping that, once the bill is introduced, that we can count on y'all's support for that. Thank you.

16: Adjournment

Chair Rowlett invited everyone to a get-together at Urban Roots, 1322 V Street in Sacramento, at 5:00 p.m.

Chair Rowlett recessed the meeting at 3:45 p.m. and invited everyone to join the Commission for Day 2 of the meeting tomorrow at 9:00 a.m.