

**GOVERNOR'S ADVISORY COMMISSION ON MENTAL ILLNESS AND
THE CORRECTIONS SYSTEM**

MINUTES

**December 20, 2019
10:00 a.m.**

**DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS CONFERENCE ROOM
COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE
105 PLEASANT STREET
CONCORD, NH**

Commissioner Helen E. Hanks called the Commission meeting to order at 10:00 am.

Participants:

Helen E. Hanks, Commissioner NH Department of Corrections, Chairperson
Robert Lynn, Chief Justice, NH Supreme Court (Retired)
Thomas Sherman, Senator
Robert Steigmeyer, President & CEO, Concord Hospital
Thomas Velardi, County Attorney, Strafford County
Julianne Carbine, Department of Mental Health Services, DHHS
Dean Christon, Executive Director, New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority
Emily Rice, Esq. City of Manchester
Kenneth Norton, Executive Director, NAMI
Henry Lipman, Director, NH Medicaid
Renny Cushing, Representative
Jim Boffetti, Esq. Attorney General's office
Lois Monette, Administrative Assistant, Commissioner's Office

This Commission was formed to examine and make recommendations on issues facing individuals with mental illnesses in the corrections system. Executive Order 2019-02

Commissioner Hanks welcomed everyone and introduced the new members, Dean Christon, Executive Director New Hampshire Housing Authority, Henry Lipman, Director of New Hampshire Medicaid program and Representative Renny Cushing.

Commissioner Hanks noted the next steps are how do we prioritize the recommendations in the Governor's report? What will take a little time, longer time? What to tackle first?

Representative Cushing noted that DHHS has some momentum in the passing of HB4, for mobile health crisis centers.

Commissioner Hanks agreed and noted that this Commission can be a support to the initiative but not replicate what DHHS is doing.

Executive Director Christon reported that rental-housing vacancies in the state are under 1% in most of our market area.

There is a perception that Federal Housing Assistance programs are closed to everyone with mental, behavioral issues and/or criminal history of some sort but that is not necessarily true. There are certainly some hard stops, i.e. someone who has been convicted of the manufacture and distribution of methamphetamine or on the lifetime sex offender registry are barred for life from any federal housing assistance program. Many people think that anyone with any kind of felony is barred from assistance but the reality is that the federal statute and regulations gives housing authorities some flexibility around creating local policies about how to deal with people with some type of criminal history.

In New Hampshire, there is 16 housing programs, plus the New Hampshire Housing Authority. Each has their own policies and administrative plans. Historically, they have been restrictive but there might be an opportunity for education with local housing providers. Much of the federally assisted housing in this state is with privately owned properties, around nine thousand units of tenant based and several thousand units of project based rentals, and they have their own tenant selection and guidelines. Therefore, even if someone is technically eligible for the federal subsidy, they might not meet the property owner's requirements.

We have done some work around people with behavioral health issues specifically and have had some success with getting private landlords to engage. It is a process with assurances to the property owners that the clients have been vetted and support services are available. Even in our voucher program, generally for people who are not necessarily with behavioral health or criminal record issues there is a need to do a lot of education, training and support to get landlords to participate in the program.

CEO Steigmeyer asks is there a sense of the shortage of housing units in the state.

Executive Director Christon replied around 20,000 and by spring are hoping to have a market view assessment ready.

Executive Director Norton asked if there is any tracking of those denied housing.

Executive Director Christon replied that they could probably determine those numbers for the tenant based assistance program that they operated directly. Around 3600 clients. The problem is gathering the data from the other 15 programs and the privately owned projects in the state. It is very un-centralized.

There are some efforts to create an inventory of supportive housing that is designed to serve people with special needs, one of which is people with behavioral health issues. That effort is current ongoing.

Commissioner Hanks mentioned some efforts the department has been engaged in regarding housing for those justice involved. Two years ago, the Governor's Commission on Alcohol and other Drugs, provided \$500,000 to help people leaving jail or state prison with 3 months housing and wrap around services that was through an existing contract with Harbor Homes at the time. The housing applications and the reluctance of landlords made it very challenging for DOC to place a person even when DOC provided the support services. That contract was terminated because of the challenges.

Another RFP went out with \$950,000 and the same concept; a vendor did come forward, but had issues in another area. The point being that the funding is available but who is going to be our partner in housing for this population when there are so many people looking for housing overall.

Executive Director Christon noted that with supportive housing, you have services providers that have the skill set to work with certain populations and the housing providers, both profit and nonprofit can be uncomfortable with the population. They have been trying to make those connections, but it has been slow. It has been more challenging than any of them has anticipated. There have been some positive success; Sullivan County is doing a project with NHHFA that focuses on ex-offenders with substance abuse issues.

Commissioner Hanks asked Director Lipman in the context of this conversation in reference to support services and case management, what would Medicaid not cover and cover.

Director Lipman replied that basically, Medicaid covers getting someone into housing, basic items like curtains and some wrap around services. He can provide a basic outline at another time. They are starting to work on implementing current budget items.

Commissioner Hanks noted that it would be helpful to have the facts vs the myths and hearsay of what is covered and not covered.

Commissioner Hanks also asked what is the hope of changing the platform for housing applications to a centralized one, in addition, are they really approving people on a case-to-case basis or is everyone just being denied?

Director Lipman remarked that in looking at this committee minutes, the discussion about prioritizing populations and the resources available, that factors into it as well. People who have not had anything that makes them a detriment to society for a period of time have more prioritized funds available to them.

Commissioner Hanks mentioned in reviewing competency evaluations on misdemeanors and following the path of an individual, you wonder how did they ended up incarcerated with all the resources that should have and could have been available to them to help prevent it.

Executive Director Norton remarked, I think a lot of this happens at the county level. I would say that there is a huge gap between competence and incompetence and extremely poor judgment and addiction. The lack of transition planning and follow up results in the cycle of repeat incarcerations, at what cost economically to society as well as the human cost?

Executive Director Norton asked. How many people have 10 or more incarcerations within a certain time limit? How many of them have a mental health or addiction issue?

Strafford County Attorney Velardi replied. Part one of that question is just booking data; all 10 county jails can get you that information. Part two is more complicated, what is the story behind the booking? I come from a county where we think that is important to know, so we assess everyone who comes through the door, other counties make the choice not to. That comes back to having a nonintegrated correctional system. At the time of arrest, the services offered should not be different from county to county.

Commissioner Hanks noted that the DOC is responsible for over 6,000 people on probation and parole.

Senator Sherman noted that he has a bill that will make Medically Assisted Treatment (MAT) part of correctional facilities across the state as fundamental care.

Commissioner Hanks noted that she is looking for direction on where we can begin. Some action steps that are deliverable. The conversation around housing would be fundamental; if we could make some movement there, those would be great successes. How do we take the decentralized local authorities and create some consistency around those application of those resources?

Senator Sherman mentioned that there is committee work around tiny houses currently.

Executive Director Christon mentioned that a substantial amount of people living in subsidized housing are people with disabilities and behavioral health issues.

Commissioner Hanks remarked that she will find out what data she can retrieve from the DOC system regarding housing, and that DOC does track people who are under supervision and homeless.

Commissioner Hanks noted that for January if each member could rank the areas they want to tackle starting on page 5 to the end of the report, from 1 to 10. Then the committee can start looking at those items we have consensus on and we have enough members to split into subcommittees if needed. If there are items being worked on by a different group, mark it down so we can look at what we can do to support or just observe.

CEO Steigmeyer remarked that when thinking about priorities, to think about immediate, intermediate, and longer term goals and the resources needed for each.

Director Lipman asked as we think about solutions, what is the bundle of solutions that will lead to success overall?

Commissioner Hanks noted that there is a lot for us to move forward for January.

Strafford County Attorney Velardi asked if there are any thumbnails from the Commission to Study Mental Health Courts in New Hampshire.

Commissioner Hanks remarked that she would send out the minutes to the group.

CEO Steigmeyer noted that it would be very helpful to stay connected to the status of the 10 Year Mental Health Plan as the progression is going to parallel this work very closely.

Senator Sherman noted that DHHS will be reporting their progress on the plan to the Legislature in September.

The meeting adjourned at 11:53 a.m.

Respectfully submitted, Lois Monette

2020 meeting dates: usually every third Friday of the month.

All meeting are at 10:00am

January 13	April 17	July 17	October 16
February 21	May 15	August 21	November 2
March 30	June 19	September 18	December 18