

CLERK'S SUMMARY OF MEETING AND OFFICIAL MINUTES
MIAMI-DADE COUNTY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD (BHAB)
April 21, 2025

The Behavioral Health Advisory Board (BHAB) convened its regular meeting at the Stephen P. Clark Government Center, 111 Northwest 1st Street, Miami, Florida 33128, in Conference Room 18-3, on April 21, 2025 at 10:00 a.m.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Prior to the meeting, Ms. Amanda Dominguez facilitated the swearing in of eight (8) new members to serve on the BHAB, including Judge Nushin Sayfie representing the judicial system, representatives from Behavioral Health Services, the Department of Children and Families, family members of people with behavioral health disorders, and individuals diagnosed with behavioral health conditions.

Chairman Garcia called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m., and the BHAB observed a moment of silence to honor the passing of Pope Francis.

II. ROLL CALL/INTRODUCTIONS

The following BHAB members were present: Dr. Tiffany Amrich, Mr. Stephen Talpins, Ms. Victoria Mallette, Ms. Lauren Rabitto, Ms. Laura Naredo, Ms. Vicky Sabharwal, Ms. Edith Wright, Mr. Duane Pearson, Ms. Lourdes Dorado-Rubio, Mr. Claudio Perez, Mr. William Delany, Mr. Alfredo Hernandez, Ms. Michelle Fernandez, Ms. Carolyn Acosta, The Honorable Nushin Sayfie, Mr. Gustavo Cruz, BHAB Vice Chairwoman Sally Alayon, and BHAB Chairman Senator René Garcia.

Dr. Joseph Poitier, Behavioral Health Sciences representative, arrived at 10:14 a.m.

Mr. Luis Espinosa, and Mr. Carlos Martinez, Miami-Dade Public Defender Office, were absent from today's (4/21) meeting.

Major Melissa Barosela, Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office, was excused from today's (4/21) meeting.

In addition to the BHAB members, the following supporting staff members were present: Ms. Amanda Dominguez, Ms. Elisa Quesada (who appeared on behalf of Mr. Martinez), Mr. Eduardo Tamborrel, Mr. Kevin Roque, and Mr. José Soto.

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III. PUBLIC'S REASONABLE OPPORTUNITY TO BE HEARD

Chairman Garcia opened the reasonable opportunity for the public to be heard.

An unidentified speaker reported on community training sessions at the University of Miami where her organization was introduced to multidisciplinary family therapy approaches used by substance abuse treatment providers. She noted that her organization planned to support community initiatives through data analytics and assessment services, highlighting that comprehensive wrap-around services were utilized by only 20-30% of mental health providers nationally.

Seeing no one else come forward to speak, Chairman Garcia closed the reasonable opportunity to be heard.

IV. COMMUNITY PRESENTATION

- a. Discussion on Regional Provider Data for Service Delivery Measures Presentation and analysis by Ms. Naredo.

Ms. Laura Naredo provided a comprehensive presentation on Thriving Mind South Florida, a non-profit organization that administered approximately \$104 million in public funds for mental health and substance abuse treatment services in Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties. She explained that while the organization contracted with over 40 network service providers to deliver behavioral health services to underinsured and uninsured residents, Thriving Mind did not offer direct services.

Ms. Naredo detailed how her organization collected and reported performance metrics data from network service providers to the State of Florida, including substance abuse treatment and mental health services for both adults and children. She noted the metrics encompassed residential care, outpatient treatment, and prevention programs, with statistics covering school attendance, arrest records, employment status, substance abuse treatment success rates, and housing environments.

Ms. Naredo reported positive outcomes for children's treatment measures, including improved school performance, substance abuse treatment, and safety. She noted that community behavioral and mental health treatment demonstrated considerable success but emphasized the need to monitor crisis stabilization unit utilization as decreased private sector services had increased demand on public facilities.

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In response to Chairman Garcia's inquiry about bed capacity reductions after private providers discontinued crisis services, Ms. Lourdes Dorado-Rubio reported that bed capacity had decreased by over 200 beds in the last five (5) years.

Ms. Naredo pointed out that Thriving Mind had been able to increase bed capacity for crisis services to compensate for the decreased participation from private providers.

Ms. Vicky Sabharwal explained that children's bed capacity at Jackson Health System (JHS) facilities had decreased over the past year and a half due to increased mobile response team utilization. She detailed how school-initiated MRTs effectively assessed and addressed crises, provided necessary resources to children, and offered outpatient and alternative services. Ms. Sabharwal noted these interventions reduced the need for Baker Act petitions, consequently decreasing pediatric inpatient admissions, which she emphasized was preferable for children.

Ms. Naredo confirmed that MRT implementation resulted in reduced Baker Act invocations and noted that each unit cost approximately \$1 million. She pointed out that while the units were fully funded by the State, additional funding sources were being explored. Ms. Naredo reported approximately 200 monthly calls from local residents requesting unit assistance and predicted expansion would be necessary given the program's effectiveness.

Ms. Dorado-Rubio responded to Judge Sayfie's inquiry about law enforcement awareness by confirming that memorandums of understanding existed with the County. She noted that the County's suicide prevention hotline and schools utilized MRT services, with marketing efforts underway to increase awareness among schools and the community. Local law enforcement participated in MRT training programs.

Vice Chairwoman Alayon outlined MRT procedures and highlighted that school personnel received training in system utilization. She explained that teams responded rapidly per state statute requirements for schools to engage licensed mental health professionals during behavioral health emergencies prior to police involvement, emphasizing that de-escalation and intervention strategies were prioritized in managing psychological crises.

In response to Chairman Garcia's question about procedures for treating children experiencing psychological emergencies, Vice Chairwoman Alayon explained that behavioral health practitioners utilized the Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale assessment tool to evaluate whether specialized response services were required.

Ms. Naredo advised that crisis response teams were available to all community members experiencing psychiatric emergencies. In response to questions about County 911 operators' awareness, she confirmed that 911 staff were aware of the MRT service and could select

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appropriate resources based on call presentation, though she acknowledged the need for additional operator training.

Ms. Dorado-Rubio explained that MRTs operated through a dispatch center staffed by licensed clinicians who prioritized alternative interventions over Baker Act utilization. She referenced the Miami-Dade Transportation Plan, which identified appropriate pediatric facilities for law enforcement transport rather than placement in adult settings.

Following confirmation that MRTs served all demographic populations, Chairman Garcia requested a comprehensive analysis and report detailing the various age categories utilizing MRT services.

Ms. Dorado-Rubio moved that WestCare Foundation present demographic analysis data on served age categories to BHAB at the subsequent meeting, which was seconded by Mr. Alfredo Hernandez.

Mr. Hernandez proposed incorporating MRT contact details into safety protocols distributed to families of children identified with suicidal ideation or other mental health conditions to help reduce hospital admissions.

Chairman Garcia recommended implementing a promotional initiative for MRT services while cautioning that increased utilization could strain WestCare's capacity, necessitating the identification of supplementary resources.

There being no further questions or comments, the motion for WestCare to provide an analysis report on the age groups serviced by MRTs at the next BHAB meeting passed by a vote of 19-0 (Mr. Carlos Martinez, Ms. Susan Holtzman, Mr. Luis Espinosa, and Ms. Melissa Barosela were absent).

Chairman Garcia announced his intention to advocate for increased MRT funding during upcoming budget discussions and requested that Ms. Dominguez provide detailed information about MRT operations to support these negotiations.

Discussion ensued regarding Citrus Health Network's crisis stabilization units for short-term residential treatment for children. Ms. Naredo indicated that these units served as supplementary treatment centers within the County and mentioned a dedicated long-term residential facility exclusively for boys.

Mr. Perez informed the BHAB that AGAPE was opening an adolescent girls' residential treatment facility in June 2025, initially limited to child welfare recipients, with future plans to expand services to the broader community. Ms. Michelle Fernandez noted that peer specialist teams were instrumental in successful treatment of children and reduced recidivism.

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Chairman Garcia requested statistics on recidivism among children who underwent behavioral and mental health treatment interventions, which Ms. Naredo agreed to provide.

Following discussions by various board members regarding the necessity of obtaining comprehensive statistics from behavioral and mental health treatment providers, Ms. Sabharwal moved to initiate data collection. This motion was seconded by Mr. Hernandez, and upon being put to a vote, the motion passed by a vote of 19-0 (Mr. Martinez, Ms. Holtzman, Mr. Espinosa and Ms. Barosela were absent).

Additional discussion focused on strategies for obtaining patient information from governmental agencies and determining data parameters.

Mr. Delany advocated for targeted data requests, while Mr. Perez emphasized the importance of requesting consolidated datasets encompassing both Affordable Care Act and Florida Department of Children and Families records.

Ms. Heather Winters highlighted the significance of public education regarding crisis response system access points in the County, identifying potential outreach methods such as community presentations and direct engagement with 911 operators.

Dr. Amrich recommended that focused data requests targeting specific areas would generate optimal results and foster greater cooperation from agencies.

Chairman Garcia directed board members to submit their data requests to Ms. Dominguez, with Ms. Sabharwal recommending that Baker Act data requests be limited to inpatient information.

Later in the meeting, Ms. Dorado provided a comprehensive review of the electronic dashboard used by the State to track and report involuntary Baker Act cases.

Ms. Lidia Alamo (phonetic), commented on the benefits of the MRT services especially for 24-hour facilities without licensed clinicians available at all times.

V. NEW MEMBERS/PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS

Refer to report under Section VII – Old Business/New Business: (A) Welcoming New Board members.

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

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Mr. Claudio Perez moved to approve the January 29, 2025 BHAB meeting minutes, as presented. Dr. Tiffany Amrich seconded the motion, and upon being put to a vote, passed by a vote of 18-0 (Dr. Joseph Poitier, Mr. Carlos Martinez, Ms. Susan Holtzman, and Mr. Luis Espinosa and Ms. Melissa Barosela were absent).

VII. OLD BUSINESS/NEW BUSINESS

a. Welcoming New Board Members

Chairman Garcia welcomed the newly sworn BHAB members and noted that their combined expertise would be utilized to address County behavioral health issues.

b. Review of Best Practices and Standards of Care

Ms. Amanda Dominguez explained the need for the BHAB to evaluate healthcare best practices, standards, methodologies, and tools utilized by behavioral health providers throughout the County.

Chairman Garcia requested input from BHAB members with behavioral health expertise to identify optimal practices, emphasizing the importance of properly evaluating behavioral health funding programs and selecting the most effective initiatives.

Mr. William Delany concurred and identified outcome measures as the most effective tool for determining best practices.

Mr. Claudio Perez noted that the Florida Legislature prioritized outcome-based data for funding decisions and emphasized that while data existed, it required proper documentation for legislative review to demonstrate program efficacy.

c. Analysis of Department of Children and Families (DCF) Data and Mapping

Ms. Lourdes Dorado-Rubio described the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) interactive dashboard containing comprehensive data on services, including information from facilities treating Baker Act patients. She explained that the data could be analyzed by patient demographics including age groups and facility locations. Ms. Dorado-Rubio noted that DCF planned to expand system access to allow licensed mental health providers and County law enforcement to submit data directly. She announced that DCF began utilizing the Baker Act Data Collection System in December 2024, an electronic platform for centralized submission of mental health facility data and forms.

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Dr. Tiffany Amrich confirmed that information originated from involuntary patient admissions, with Ms. Cruz noting that voluntary admission data was excluded and suggested this information be incorporated into the dashboard.

d. Update on the Mental Health Facility

Ms. Cathy Burgos, Chief Community Services Officer, Miami-Dade County Office of the Mayor, presented an update on the 20-year Mental Health Facility development project, which originated from a 2004 voter-approved initiative. She recognized Judge Leifman and Judge Sayfie for their work in diverting mentally ill individuals from the criminal justice system toward mental health treatment.

Ms. Burgos announced that Commissioner Raquel Regalado sponsored legislation regarding the project scheduled for consideration at the June 3, 2025 Board of County Commissioners meeting. She emphasized the implementation of comprehensive clinical services through a family-focused treatment model, asserting that individuals experiencing mental health crises should receive therapeutic interventions rather than criminal justice processing.

Ms. Burgos reported that the facility would initially operate with 10 crisis beds, 20 short-term beds, and 40 long-term beds and explained that the proposed legislation included a five-year budget, operational model, and funding source analysis. She noted that funding was secured for the first two years, but years three through five remained unfunded, requiring \$10 million annually for those years.

Ms. Burgos advised that over \$50 million had been invested in renovating the designated facility and indicated she would implement a community service portfolio incorporating mobile services from various organizations including the Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust and Community Action and Human Services Department.

Chairman Garcia commented that the project should serve broader community needs while recognizing the priority to assist homeless residents experiencing mental illness.

In response to questions about converting floors for housing, Ms. Burgos responded that this was not part of the current model, though the Administration was seeking ways to generate revenue through fundraising.

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e. Non-Agenda Motion – Merger of the Addition Services Board with the BHAB

Mr. Claudio Perez discussed his proposal to dissolve the Miami-Dade County Addiction Services Board (ASB) and merge it with the BHAB to create unified addiction and substance abuse treatment services. He reported that ASB members had voted to consider this dissolution at their most recent meeting.

Chairman Garcia advised that both the ASB and BHAB should make formal requests to dissolve the ASB, which could then be taken to the Board of County Commissioners.

Ms. Perez made a motion to formally sunset the ASB. This motion was seconded by Ms. Vicky Sabharwal, and upon being put to a vote, the motion passed by a vote of 19-0 (Mr. Carlos Martinez, Ms. Susan Holtzman, and Mr. Luis Espinosa and Ms. Melissa Barosela were absent).

Following the vote, Chairman Garcia confirmed that Mr. Perez served as Vice Chair of the ASB and that its members had voted for dissolution. When asked about ASB members joining the BHAB, Mr. Perez explained that members were interested but only if their agencies were not already represented.

Chairman Garcia informed him that while the BHAB roster was full, ASB members were welcome to participate in the public forum without voting rights.

VIII. Announcements

Chairman Garcia stated that mobile response teams needed a community marketing campaign and directed Ms. Dominguez to research campaign options.

Ms. Dorado asked Ms. Dominguez to provide Baker Act information to BHAB members.

Ms. Dominguez reported that the County had experienced over three Baker Act incidents in the past 90 days, showing increased mental health service recidivism. She stated that high demand for crisis services required public sector delivery since private sector services had decreased.

Chairman Garcia noted that with full board membership and approved action plans, the BHAB could meet every other month instead of monthly.

It was moved by Mr. Claudio Perez to schedule the BHAB meeting every other month on Wednesdays. This motion was seconded by Ms. Michelle Hernandez, and upon being put to a vote, passed by a vote of 19-0 (Mr. Carlos Martinez, Ms. Susan Holtzman, and Mr. Luis Espinosa and Ms. Melissa Barosela were absent).

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The next scheduled BHAB meeting would be held on Wednesday, June 25, 2025.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Behavioral Health Advisory Board (BHAB), the meeting adjourned at 11:27 a.m.

Mr. Claudio M. Perez
Presiding Officer