

**CLERK’S SUMMARY OF MINUTES**  
**MIAMI-DADE COUNTY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD (BHAB)**  
**December 11, 2025**

The Behavioral Health Advisory Board (BHAB/Board) convened a meeting at the Stephen P. Clark Government Center, 111 Northwest 1<sup>st</sup> Street, Miami, Florida 33128, in 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Chambers, on December 11, 2025 at 10:00 am.

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Senator Garcia called the meeting to order at 10:05 AM.

**II. ROLL CALL & INTRODUCTIONS**

The following BHAB members were present:

- Ms. Miriam Stewart, Miami-Dade County Public Schools;
- Dr. Tiffany Amrich, Psychologist, Community Action and Human Services Department (CAHSD);
- Major Melissa Barosela, Miami-Dade Sheriff’s Office;
- Ms. Karen Annunziato, State Attorney’s Office;
- Chairman Rene Garcia, Miami-Dade County Board of County Commissioners (BCC);
- Ms. Victoria L. Mallette, Homeless Trust;
- Ms. Laura Naredo, South Florida Behavioral Health Network;
- Ms. Lauren Rabitto, Juvenile Services Department;
- Mr. Christopher Wing, Public Health Trust;
- Ms. Edith C. Wright, Miami-Dade Corrections & Rehabilitation Department;
- Ms. Lourdes Dorado, Department of Children and Families (DCF);
- Mr. Claudio Perez, Behavioral Health Service;
- Mr. William Delaney, Behavioral Health Service;
- Ms. Michelle Fernandez;
- Mr. Gustavo Cruz, Veteran Services; and
- Mr. Luis Espinosa, Retired Fireman/First Responder.

Ms. Dominguez announced that Ms. Susan Holtzman and Ms. Carolyn Acosta were excused from today’s meeting.

Mr. Carlos J. Martinez, Mr. Alfredo Hernandez and Dr. Joseph Poitier arrived at 10:08 a.m., 10:09 a.m., and 10:17 a.m., respectively.

In addition to the BHAB members, the following staff members were present:

- Ms. Kathy Burgos, Director of Miami-Dade County Community Services Department;
- Ms. Amanda Dominguez, Mental Health Facility Program Manager/BHA Liaison, (CAHSD);
- Mr. Eduardo Tamborrel, Administrative Officer II, CAHSD; and

- Ms. Tomeka Law, Deputy Clerk, Clerk of the Board.

Vice Chairman Perez led a prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance.

### **III. PUBLIC'S REASONABLE OPPORTUNITY TO BE HEARD**

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

### **IV. NEW MEMBERS/VACANCIES**

Ms. Dominguez reported that Major Melissa Barosela, the Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office designee, had submitted her resignation from the Board due to her retirement.

Major Barosela announced she was retiring after 29 years of service with the agency and expressed her willingness to continue supporting the Board in any capacity. She conveyed her appreciation for the opportunity to serve on the Board and noted the inspiration she gained from witnessing the commitment and passion of Board members regarding mental health and behavioral health issues.

Major Barosela introduced Heather Winters as the Sheriff's Office's recommended replacement designee. She highlighted Ms. Winters' extensive experience in the field, including her current work with the Sheriff's Office's crisis response unit, threat management unit, and crisis negotiation team. Major Barosela stated that Ms. Winters possessed expertise in both community mental health and law enforcement operations, making her a valuable addition to the Board.

Chairman Garcia congratulated Major Barosela on her retirement and thanked her for her service to both the Sheriff's Office and the community. He confirmed that the Board would await the official appointment letter from the Sheriff before proceeding with the formal appointment process.

Ms. Dominguez also reported a judicial system designation change. She announced that Judge Sayfie had recommended Judge Maria Verde to serve on the Board and indicated that a letter regarding this recommendation had been received and would need to be considered for action at a future meeting.

### **V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Vice Chairman Perez moved that the September 22, 2025 BHAB minutes be approved. This motion was seconded by Ms. Mallette, and upon being put to a vote, passed 18-0. (Dr. Joseph Poitier, Mr. Duane Pearson, Ms. Susan Holtzman, Ms. Carolyn Acosta, and Judge Nushin Sayfie were absent.)

## **VI. OLD BUSINESS/NEW BUSINESS**

### **a. DCF Informational Sheet**

Ms. Dorado presented a DCF informational sheet that had been compiled in response to various requests and discussions from the previous meeting regarding 988 data. She highlighted House Bill 1091 from earlier in the year, which added language to Florida Statute 394 and the Mental Health Act. This legislation codified the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline as a Department of Children and Families function, making it part of the coordinated system of care components and granting DCF rulemaking authority around 988. She noted that the rule had not yet been released but would be shared with the Board once available for public comment.

Ms. Dorado explained that she had requested data from headquarters on calls made to 988 both statewide and specifically from Miami-Dade County, with more detailed information available upon request. She highlighted that there were 148 calls that included a suicide attempt in progress out of approximately 350,000 total calls in Miami-Dade County for fiscal year 2024-2025.

Mr. Martinez noted that the numbers being reported seemed very low and requested additional information about the types of calls and which counties the calls were originating from.

Ms. Dorado addressed concerns raised by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) regarding Florida's behavioral health workforce challenges. She noted that Senate Bill 330, passed in 2024, appointed the University of South Florida to research workforce issues and release information through an interactive data dashboard that had been created and released a few months prior. She highlighted two types of grant proposals addressing behavioral health workforce development: rural workforce demonstration grants for innovative programs in Florida's rural communities, and community academic partnership grants supporting collaborative implementation and evaluation projects for workforce recruitment, training, and professional development. The proposals were due on January 30th.

Ms. Dorado highlighted concerning data indicating a statewide trend that had affected Miami-Dade County since 2018. She reported that the County had lost 259 Baker Act beds, all adult beds in private hospitals, identifying the most significant gap as the loss of short-term residential treatment facilities.

In response to Chairman Garcia's inquiry, Ms. Dorado explained that short-term residential beds were publicly funded facilities that allowed individuals to receive care in a locked crisis stabilization unit for longer than the typical three to seven days, with stays typically lasting up to 90 days. She stated that the County had one facility with 16 beds serving adults, which was funded through DCF, but the provider had discontinued service due to financial reasons.

Ms. Naredo indicated that another provider had offered to take over the program and that funding was already allocated to restart the program as soon as facilities became available.

Mr. Martinez discussed how the loss of beds created a ripple effect for individuals requiring longer stays. He explained that when beds were unavailable, it resulted in repeated calls to 911, police interactions, potential arrests, and individuals being housed in jail rather than treatment facilities. He emphasized that having short-term beds would keep individuals out of the criminal justice system while they received treatment locally in Miami-Dade County. Mr. Martinez stressed that the challenge with the Miami Center was that funding existed for only 75 beds, which should be supplemented by the state.

Chairman Garcia responded that additional state funding was highly unlikely given the County's budget crisis.

Following discussion, Mr. Martinez made a motion to obtain the number of suicide attempts and the success rate of those attempts for the past three (3) years. This motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Perez, and upon being put to a vote, passed 19-0. (Mr. Duane Pearson, Ms. Susan Holtzman, Ms. Carolyn Acosta, and Judge Nushin Sayfie were absent.)

Chairman Garcia directed Ms. Dominguez to obtain the requested information from the medical examiner's office.

#### **b. Digital Outreach and Community Engagement Subcommittee**

Mr. Hernandez presented on behalf of the Digital Outreach and Community Engagement subcommittee, reporting that Ms. Holtzman had been selected as Chairperson. He announced that the subcommittee proposed a two-phase team-based approach to its messaging strategy: Phase 1 would focus on normalizing the discussion of accessing mental health and substance use disorder resources and treatment, and Phase 2 would focus on connecting the target population to available resources.

Ms. Dominguez explained that the subcommittee's discussion centered on digitalization and the Board's scope regarding digital presence. She stated that the subcommittee had motioned to have the County's communications team attend their next meeting in January to provide an overview of the dos and don'ts regarding social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and podcasts. Ms. Dominguez noted that the subcommittee wanted to target a range of individuals in the community, not just adults, but also youth and adolescents. She explained that the subcommittee proposed uniting with the Anti-Stigma and Community Wellness subcommittees because much of their messaging surrounding wellness would overlap, and felt it would be better to have these groups collaborate to develop a more clearly defined unified message.

Ms. Dominguez indicated that ACA Shanika Graves recommended having the County's communications team participate in the next meeting to establish the dos and don'ts for the Board's digital campaign.

Chairman Garcia emphasized the goal of having one consistent message across all providers, with the flexibility to tailor it to specific demographics. He suggested partnering with

Community Papers, noting they had done excellent work with podcasting and could assist in disseminating the Board's message to the community along with provider names.

Mr. Hernandez clarified that the subcommittee was seeking approval for the two-phase approach. The discussion confirmed the subcommittee's plan to meet in December to gather messaging ideas from the other committees and develop a unified message strategy to submit to the Board.

Chairman Garcia concluded that no immediate action was needed, and the discussion would continue at the next BHAB meeting in January.

### **c. Wellness and Anti-Stigma Subcommittee**

Ms. Amrich presented the subcommittee's proposed mission statement: "The Community Wellness and Anti-Stigma subcommittee promotes holistic behavioral health and community wellness by fostering education, connection and support while challenging stigma and empowering individuals and families of all ages to thrive." She emphasized that recovery involves thriving rather than simply returning to baseline, and stressed normalizing conversations with the message "it's okay to not be okay."

Ms. Amrich explained that the Stigma Free Workplace campaign involves an organizational pledge that creates opportunities for agencies to self-reflect on policies and procedures that promote mental health-seeking behavior. She noted that she had recently completed recertification for Mental Health First Aid, which consisted of approximately six and a half hours of virtual instruction with an additional two hours of pre-course work, and described it as a non-threatening learning experience.

Chairman Garcia expressed enthusiasm about the subcommittee's work and asked about Mental Health First Aid certification, including how it operated, who provided it, age requirements, and how it could be deployed throughout the community. He proposed introducing the training to the Board of County Commissioners to identify businesses within their districts for outreach.

Ms. Stewart noted that Miami-Dade County Public Schools provided Youth Mental Health First Aid training to all employees who had direct contact with students. She stated that the state mandated at least 80% of school district employees be trained in youth mental health first aid, which the district met last year, and that the district offers four to six trainings monthly for employees to recognize signs, understand the referral process, and connect students with mental health professionals.

Ms. Fernandez, a Mental Health First Aid instructor, informed the Board that Thriving Mind's website calendar listed mental health providers offering free on-site community trainings, which Ms. Naredo confirmed. Ms. Fernandez also mentioned peer-to-peer trainings offered through Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP), an evidence-based curriculum for developing wellness tools.

Ms. Mallette noted Thriving Mind's close relationship with the Homeless Trust in providing training opportunities to staff and the homeless continuum.

Chairman Garcia expressed concern that behavioral issues within families often become normalized, leading to desensitization and missed warning signs until a crisis or suicide occurs.

Mr. Hernandez expressed support for normalizing mental health conversations and equipping people to help those in need, highlighting available trainings listed on NAMI's website.

Vice Chairman Perez inquired whether Mental Health First Aid training was required for providers. Ms. Naredo responded that it was not a required DCF training but was highly encouraged for provider participation.

Vice Chairman Perez asked about a condensed version of the training, noting that many organizations used platforms where trainings typically lasted no more than two hours. Ms. Fernandez explained that the Mental Health First Aid training provided extensive content and that eight hours was sufficient time to deliver quality content for long-term, sustainable impact.

Mr. Hernandez confirmed that some trainings could extend to twelve hours, while Ms. Naredo emphasized that as an evidence-based practice, condensing the training to two hours would jeopardize its integrity and cause fidelity issues.

Mr. Martinez advocated for prioritizing Mental Health First Aid training and recommended mandatory training for all Board members, especially those promoting mental health awareness and anti-stigma messaging. He recalled asking a former employee for a brief synopsis of the eight-hour training, only to realize after 30-40 minutes that the full training was necessary. Mr. Martinez stated the knowledge gained was invaluable for someone who interacts with people continuously.

Chairman Garcia encouraged all Board members to become certified in Mental Health First Aid but indicated it would remain optional as the Board reviewed recommendations for its rules and bylaws. A motion was made to have Ms. Dominguez coordinate a Mental Health First Aid certification program for the Board. The motion was seconded and approved.

Vice Chairman Perez moved to have Ms. Dominguez coordinate a Mental Health First Aid certification program for the Board. This motion was seconded by Ms. Mallette, and upon being put to a vote, passed 19-0. (Mr. Duane Pearson, Ms. Susan Holtzman, Ms. Carolyn Acosta, and Judge Nushin Sayfie were absent.)

#### **d. 1<sup>st</sup> Responders Suicide Prevention**

Mr. Wing of Jackson Public Health Trust presented information from the First Responders Suicide Prevention subcommittee, reporting that the subcommittee met a few weeks prior and focused primarily on developing messaging and a mission statement. He noted that the subcommittee discussed the various mental health services available to first responders and recognized that while first responders were often made aware of these resources, the challenge remained in connecting them to services to ensure they received the help they needed.

Mr. Wing presented the proposed mission statement: "To support the mental health and well-being of first responders by promoting effective suicide prevention strategies, reducing stigma and connecting them with culturally competent resources."

Mr. Espinosa stated that he had participated in Youth Mental Health First Aid certification and identified an obstacle in the process: parents must be notified before a child identified as needing services could receive counseling. He noted that in Hispanic and Haitian communities, parents were often resistant to receiving assistance, viewing it as "airing dirty laundry to strangers."

Ms. Stewart commended the school district for its efforts to build awareness with parents to reduce hesitation and stigma through home visits and personal contact. She clarified that while parental consent was required for more intensive therapeutic services, trained district employees could have conversations with students and refer them to school counselors. Ms. Stewart noted that the district promoted resources via the website, hosted webinars through the Parent Academy, and maintained a parent assistance line available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. She acknowledged that while the system had improved over the years, parent communication remained the first step in the process.

Mr. Espinosa inquired whether police officers had Mental Health First Aid training.

Major Barosela confirmed that the Sheriff's Office peer support team received Mental Health First Aid training as part of their onboarding.

Mr. Espinosa raised concerns regarding the harmful effects of shift work on firefighters' mental health, advocating for the elimination of traditional 24-hour shifts due to inadequate sleep, which he emphasized was vital to stress management. He noted that stress was relative and that proper sleep was important for alleviating stress. Mr. Espinosa recommended having at least one firefighter trained in Mental Health First Aid at every station for prevention purposes.

Ms. Fernandez clarified that Mental Health First Aid certification was recommended to be renewed every three years for both youth and adult certifications.

Responding to the differences between the youth and adult certifications, Ms. Amrich explained that both were from the same evidence-based model originating from Australia, with the youth version focused on conversations with young people rather than adults, making the programs essentially the same with curriculum differences.

Chairman Garcia acknowledged the daily experiences and challenges faced by first responders and asked Ms. Dominguez to include a breakdown by profession, specifically for first responders, when obtaining statistical data on suicides and suicide attempts from the medical examiner's office.

Chairman Garcia indicated his intent to meet with Miami-Dade County's Fire Chief, as well as reaching out to the five local municipal fire departments, to determine what programs were currently in place and to promote Mental Health First Aid training.

**e. Housing Stability and Support Services Subcommittee**

Ms. Dominguez reported that the Housing Stability and Support Services subcommittee did not have quorum at the time of the scheduled meeting and had been rescheduled for January 2026.

**f. Unified Campaign Message**

Earlier in the meeting, the Board discussed developing a unified campaign message across all subcommittees and providers. Ms. Dominguez explained that the Digital Outreach and Community Engagement subcommittee proposed that all committees bring their messaging recommendations to the Board so members could reach consensus on the predominant information to communicate. She noted that Ms. Holtzman, chair of the Digital Outreach and Community Engagement subcommittee, reported that NAMI had run a campaign prior to the 988 initiative and had resources available to share with the Board to collaborate on developing a unified message.

The discussion centered on creating one consistent message across all providers rather than having each subcommittee deliver different messages.

Chairman Garcia supported the concept of having one consistent message across all providers with the flexibility to tailor it to specific demographics.

Ms. Dominguez indicated that the Digital Outreach and Community Engagement subcommittee planned to meet in December to gather messaging ideas from other committees and develop a unified message strategy to present to the Board at the January 2026 meeting. No action was taken on this item.

**g. Update on Mental Health Facility**

Ms. Burgos presented a comprehensive update on the mental health facility project, reporting that the item had been brought to the Appropriations Committee the previous day. She noted that the project had been 20 years in development since Miami-Dade County residents voted for the creation of a mental health diversion facility in 2004. She highlighted that the facility would have 75 beds total: 10 crisis beds, 20 short-term beds, and 45 long-term beds. Ms. Burgos described the facility as bringing together a continuum of care and comprehensive services for the most vulnerable individuals in Miami-Dade County, including those struggling with co-occurring mental health and substance abuse issues.

Ms. Burgos explained that the item included the opiate settlement disbursement plan, with funding from the opiate settlement recommended for inclusion in the project. She stated that a five-year funding plan would be presented to the Board of County Commissioners (BCC). Ms. Burgos advised that the department had complied with the BCC's directive by negotiating contracts with two providers; WestCare as the operator and clinical provider, and The Advocates for case management services and wraparound services. She noted that the recommended provider was uniquely positioned with a crisis mobile unit and outpatient services locally to support clients re-entering the community. The item also requested designation as a receiving facility to allow law enforcement to use the facility as a resource for Baker Acts and Marchman Acts, becoming part of the transportation plan.

Chairman Garcia thanked Ms. Burgos for the update and reaffirmed his commitment to ensuring the facility served not only diversionary program clients but also children and adults requiring mental health services. He acknowledged the work that had been done and the contributions of those involved in the project.

Ms. Dorado raised concerns about potential conflicts of interest, noting that her company would be bidding on multiple contracts to build services for the new facility.

Chairman Garcia assured Ms. Dorado and other Board members that proper procedures would be followed to minimize or eliminate any potential conflicts of interest. He reminded members that the Board lacked procurement authority and emphasized the importance of collaboration with Ms. Dominguez to identify and notify members of any potential conflicts in advance to facilitate resolution.

Ms. Annunziato, Chief of the Treatment Court Unit handling Baker Acts and diversionary court cases, reported that she had toured the facility and viewed the courtroom space. She expressed interest in understanding how the courtroom would be utilized to serve clients and support the Court's operations.

Ms. Burgos indicated that she would coordinate with Ms. Annunziato and her team following BCC approval to finalize partnerships and determine courtroom utilization. She noted that the item included amendments to the lease and land plan to expand the facility's scope beyond serving only diversionary program clients to include community individuals with severe mental illness. Ms. Burgos informed the Board that Mayor Levine Cava had signed a pledge resulting in Miami-Dade County being designated as a stigma-free organization by NAMI, and suggested potential collaboration with Jackson Health System to leverage resources.

## **VII. NEW BUSINESS**

Chairman Garcia disclosed that he had discussions with Congressman Patrick Kennedy regarding an evidence-based, outcome-driven model in the behavioral health space and introduced Mr. Daniel Hernandez to provide an update presentation.

Mr. Daniel Hernandez, CEO of SyHealth, presented on a behavioral health initiative developed in partnership with the Healthsperien team and Patrick Kennedy. He outlined key initiatives including: payment reform focused on paying for quality and outcomes, establishing data infrastructure, workforce development, and implementing evidence-based innovations.

Mr. Hernandez explained that his organization had been working with the Healthsperien team and Patrick Kennedy to develop models for interoperability between healthcare providers and electronic health record systems. He stated that the initiative sought to establish a private-public partnership to bring additional funding to Miami-Dade County to integrate the behavioral health ecosystem, provide measurable outcomes, and share data. Mr. Hernandez noted that Miami-Dade County would be one of approximately ten pilot programs nationwide.

Mr. Hernandez explained that the funding model would involve Miami-Dade County providing initial seed money, followed by additional funding from private and public entities, including the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI), ARPA, and other federal and state agencies. He stated that this funding would support services not currently covered by Medicaid, creating a true continuum of care based on outcomes. Mr. Hernandez noted that the initiative would follow a phased approach, with the first step being to establish partnerships and bring stakeholders together, followed by deploying evidence-based practices and demonstrating return on investment before rolling out broader payment reform.

Chairman Garcia emphasized the importance of paying for quality and outcomes rather than simply paying for services, noting this had been a longstanding challenge in the mental health care sector. He expressed support for rewarding providers who deliver quality outcomes and helping them expand rather than continuing with systems that did not ensure the best results.

Vice Chairman Perez noted that the proposed partnership aligned with existing Board initiatives to aggregate data and move away from fee-for-service billing to ensure clients received the care they actually needed.

Mr. Hernandez confirmed that the model would shift payment from seeing patients to paying for outcomes, including supporting peer support specialists and other non-clinical services that historically had not been covered but were essential to achieving positive outcomes.

Responding to Vice Chairman Perez's questions about the data infrastructure and technology components, Mr. Hernandez explained that the initiative required bringing interoperability into the system by integrating provider data into one common platform to enable holistic patient analysis. He noted that the average American's healthcare data currently resided in approximately seventy different systems and stated that a federal initiative was underway to enable system integration. Mr. Hernandez expressed the goal of establishing Miami-Dade County as a behavioral health information exchange hub.

Mr. Alfredo Hernandez emphasized the importance of connecting services to people in need and stressed the value of an outcome-based approach. He requested a copy of the presentation and

additional information regarding the metrics used to measure outcomes and the glide path for transitioning providers.

Mr. Daniel Hernandez agreed to share information on how data would be used, the models for shifting from traditional fee-for-service, and the five-phase glide path to assist behavioral health providers in transitioning to absorb the total cost of care.

Vice Chairman Perez made a motion to prepare a Memo of Understanding to participate in the pilot program, with the expectation of bringing it back to the BCC for approval. The motion was seconded by Mr. Delaney, and upon being put to a vote, passed 18-0. (Mr. Carlos Martinez, Mr. Duane Pearson, Ms. Susan Holtzman, Ms. Carolyn Acosta, and Judge Nushin Sayfie were absent.)

Chairman Garcia thanked Mr. Hernandez for the presentation and stated that the motion had been adopted to explore establishing a memorandum of understanding to move forward with quality and outcome-based care specifics for Miami-Dade County.

### **VIII. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Ms. Dominguez announced that the next BHAB meeting would be held on January 28, 2026 at 10:00 a.m.

Ms. Mallette announced that a Homeless Memorial event honoring the unhoused individuals who passed away this year will be held on next Friday, December 19, 2025 on the west side of the Stephen P. Clark Center.

Chairman Garcia requested Board members to attend the Homeless Memorial event if possible to send a unified message regarding mental health and to bring dignity to the homeless. He commended everyone for the work done on the Board and in the subcommittees.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the BHAB, the meeting was adjourned at 11:38 a.m.