



State of New Jersey

GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

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Governor

TAHESHA L. WAY
Lt. Governor

NEIL VAN ESS
Acting Chairman

CELINA LEVY
Executive Director

MINUTES

Governor's Council on Substance Use Disorder

December 10, 2024

Attendance: Neil Van Ess (Chairman), Celina Levy (Executive Director), John Armato (Public Member), Gregg Benson (Public Member), Cornell Williamson (AOC), Michelle Graham-Lyons (DCA), Herb Kaldany (DOC), Lashunda Omida (DOH), Don Hallcom (DHS), Noelle-Lee Turner (DMAVA)

Call to Order

The three hundred and eighty-eighth regular meeting of the Governor's Council on Substance Use Disorder was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Acting Chairman Neil Van Ess.

Open Public Meetings Act Statement

Mr. Van Ess announced that notice of this meeting was provided in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act (N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 – 10:4-21). In addition, Mr. Van Ess stated that public comments were to be provided electronically, through the GCSUD website contact portal between the hours of 10am and 1pm on the day of the meeting and must state "Public Comment" in the subject line.

Roll Call

Katelyn Assenheimer called the roll. Members present and absent were noted for the record. Chairman Van Ess informed the Council that this meeting would be for informational purposes only due to the lack of quorum.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Van Ess welcomed everyone to the meeting. He shared his admiration and gratitude for those being honored today and stated how important the Alliance volunteers are to the communities they serve.

Presentation:" 2024 Volunteer of the Year Ceremony"

Sara Thode, Director of Prevention and Planning shared with everyone that the Alliances represent the largest network of community-based, substance-use disorder coalitions in the nation with 300 Alliances encompassing over 400 municipalities statewide. Ms. Thode stated that these volunteers have worked to

change and save lives within their communities and throughout New Jersey. The County Volunteers of the Year were introduced by State Alliance Coordinators, Kristin McCarthy and Kim Rodriguez, and each volunteer will be mailed a framed certificate in recognition of their service.

Ms. Thode announced that Samantha Lugo was awarded as the 2024 W. Cary Edwards Statewide Volunteer of the Year. Samantha Lugo has been a member of the North Bergen Township Municipal Alliance for over five years. The community is also a recipient of a federal Drug Free Communities Grant. Samantha has been a guidance counselor in the North Bergen school system for 20 years, and through her efforts, there has been an explosion of youth volunteerism with the North Bergen Township Municipal Alliance. She is the moderator of the township's youth task force and coordinates the student volunteers in the township's Safe Spot program. Through the North Bergen Tobacco Age of Sale Enforcement (T.A.S.E) program, Samantha was able to show elected officials that local merchants were selling tobacco and vaping products to youth. Through her efforts, she participated in the development of a stand-alone North Bergen tobacco license that will go into effect in 2025 and will allow the local health department to oversee all tobacco sales in the community. Samantha's unwavering commitment to the health and wellbeing of the North Bergen community makes her a deserving recipient of the 2024 W. Cary Edwards Statewide Volunteer of the Year.

After the awards presentation, Deputy Director Rebecca Alfaro introduced the First Place winner of the Partnership for a Drug Free New Jersey Shout Down Drugs Prevention Concert, Jordan Ford to share a recording of his song, "Fading".

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Celina Levy thanked the PDFNJ Shout Down Drugs contest winner Jordan for his performance. She also shared her gratitude to Volunteer of the Year recipient Samantha Lugo, along with all of the other honorees, for their dedication to their respective communities, and thanked all those who joined the meeting today to honor VOY recipients, also offering gratitude to all Alliance participants for their ongoing dedication to their communities.

The process of gathering Master Plan content is almost complete, and the GCSUD office will be reaching out to public members in January for input. Once this information is received, and all Master Plan content is entered into the document, the final draft will be shared with the Governor's office and the Master Plan subcommittee for review, after which it will be presented to the Council for adoption.

Ms. Levy thanked the Council members for guidance and support, County Coordinators and Alliances for their good work in light of challenges faced, GCSUD staff for their strong work ethic and to Chairman Van Ess for his leadership.

Adjournment

Chairman Van Ess adjourned the meeting at 10:54.