



Georgia Department of Behavioral Health &
Developmental Disabilities

Kevin Tanner, Commissioner

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Office of the Commissioner

Board of Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities

Thursday, April 23, 2026 1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

200 Piedmont Avenue, S.E.

West Tower, 5th Floor, Board Room 512

Atlanta, GA 30334

This meeting was conducted in person and via WebEx for the public and Board Members.

Meeting Called By: Lasa Joiner, Chair

Recording Secretary: Chelsee Nabritt, Board and Special Project Manager

Board Members

- **In-person:** Lasa Joiner, David Glass
- **Virtual Conferencing:** Bill Slaughter, Jean Sumner, M.D., Jimmy Thomas, Amanda Owens, Deb Bailey
- **Absent:** Jan Ligon, Ph.D., Bubber Epps

DBHDD Leadership: Brandon Kenney, *Assistant Commissioner of Operations*, Monica Patel, *Assistant Commissioner for Agency Affairs and Chief Legal Officer*, Jason McSwain, *Deputy Assistant Commissioner of Operations and Chief Information Officer*, Brenda Woodard, *General Counsel and Ethics Officer*

Agenda

Call to Order: Chair Lasa Joiner called the meeting to order at 1:02 P.M.

Chair Lasa Joiner welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked Chelsee Nabritt to conduct the roll call.

Recovery Speaker

Mrs. Ursula Berger, Outreach Coordinator for the Respect Institute, approached the podium and thanked the Board members for providing individuals from the Respect

Institute with the opportunity to share their recovery journeys. Mrs. Berger then introduced Jordan Darden and invited her to the podium to tell her story. Ms. Darden shared that she was proud to stand before the Board because there were many times in her life when she felt like giving up. She spoke about the challenges she faced, including self-harm, sexual abuse, substance use, loneliness, and suicidal thoughts. During some of her darkest moments, she felt as though she had no one to turn to and no one who understood what she was experiencing.

Ms. Darden explained that one of the turning points in her recovery came when she contacted the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Through that call, she was connected to resources and support, including the Respect Institute, which helped guide her toward healing and recovery. She stated that through her experiences, she learned the importance of resilience and discovered that overcoming challenges is not about never falling, but about continuing to rise each time you do. Through her recovery journey, she found healing, purpose, and hope for the future.

Today, Ms. Darden said she is grateful to have survived those difficult times because she now has the opportunity to share her story and encourage other young women who may be struggling. She mentioned that despite life's hardships, a better future is possible, and purpose can be found beyond adversity if you just keep moving forward.

Ms. Darden thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak and then left the podium.

Chair Lasa Joiner then introduced the agenda items requiring Board action.

Action Items

1. Board Meeting Minutes – February 26, 2026. Chair Lasa Joiner reminded the Board members that they received the Board meeting minutes in advance for review and asked for a motion to approve. David Glass made a motion, which was seconded by Amanda Owens. The motion passed unanimously.

Next, Commissioner Tanner introduced and invited Melissa Sperbeck, Director of the Division of Strategy, Technology, and Performance for the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, to the podium to provide licensure updates regarding the Rules and Regulations for Drug Abuse Treatment and Education Programs (DATEP) and the Licensure Enforcement and Sanctions Rules. She requested Board approval to publish the revised proposed DATEP Rules for an additional 30-day public comment period and approval for final adoption of the Licensure Enforcement and Sanctions Rules.

Ms. Sperbeck informed the Board that she would provide updates regarding the Department's licensure authority and responsibilities, outline the rulemaking process,

discuss key focus areas, and conclude with requests for Board action. She explained that the Department is currently updating the rules to reflect the change in licensing authority and to make necessary modifications. The rulemaking process includes Board review, a public comment period, and final adoption following consideration of public feedback. The Department received fifty-one public comments from nine commenters across two rule sets, resulting in five approved rule changes. Key themes identified during the public comment period for the DATEP Rules included clarification of the outpatient program definition, Licensed Practical Nurse participation in admission-related activities, tuberculosis screening requirements for staff, and laboratory requirements at admission. The Licensure Enforcement and Sanctions Rules establish requirements related to licensing, enforcement actions, investigations, corrective action plans, and sanctions to ensure consistent oversight practices.

Lastly, an overview was provided of the Department's ongoing licensure and regulatory work involving substance use disorder treatment programs, narcotic treatment programs, criminal history background checks, community living arrangements, and adult residential mental health programs. Following review and consideration of all public comments received, approval was requested to publish the revised DATEP Rules for an additional 30-day public comment period and to adopt the Licensure Enforcement and Sanctions Rules as proposed.

Ms. Sperbeck concluded her presentation and asked whether there were any questions from the Board prior to requesting approval of her items. After confirming there were no questions, Chair Lasa Joiner proceeded with the action items on the agenda.

2. Rules and Regulations for Drug Abuse Treatment and Education Programs- Request for Approval of Publication of Revised Proposed Drug Abuse Treatment and Education Programs Rules for Additional thirty-day comment period. Chair Lasa Joiner asked for a motion. David Glass made a motion, which was seconded by Amanda Owens. The motion passed unanimously.
3. Rules and Regulations for Licensure Enforcement and Sanctions – Request for Final Adoption. Chair Lasa Joiner asked for a motion. David Glass made a motion, which was seconded by Jean Sumner, M.D. The motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner's Report:

Commissioner Tanner invited Joy Bell, Director of the Office of Mental Health Justice Programs for the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, to the podium to provide an overview of the Co-Responder Budget presentation. Ms. Bell explained that co-responder programs pair behavioral health professionals with law enforcement officers and other first responders to improve crisis response, divert individuals from unnecessary incarceration or hospitalization when appropriate, and

connect individuals with community-based behavioral health services. She discussed the various co-responder models currently operating throughout Georgia, including clinician/first responder ride-along, dispatch-based, telehealth/virtual, behavioral health professional, school-based, and multi-jurisdictional models. She further noted that Co-Responder programs are structured differently across communities to meet local needs and available resources while maintaining the same overall goal of improving the outcomes for individuals experiencing behavioral health crisis.

She informed the Board that Senate Bill 403 requires the completion of an annual report summarizing the work and outcomes of co-responder programs throughout the state, including both DBHDD-funded programs and those supported through other funding sources.

She also highlighted several areas of progress and innovation within the program. She discussed the success of the 2026 Georgia Co-Responder Conference, which brought together law enforcement officers, behavioral health professionals, and community partners from across the state to strengthen collaboration, share best practices, and highlight innovative response strategies. She also shared examples of expanding school-based co-responder programs, including partnerships between Georgia Pines, local school districts, like Colquitt County Schools, Thomas County Schools and law enforcement agencies to address the growing behavioral health needs of students. These programs provide crisis intervention, care coordination, family support, follow-up services, and early intervention efforts designed to keep students engaged in school and connected to appropriate services.

Additionally, she presented information regarding a Co-Responder/Jail In-Reach Hybrid Pilot Program designed to improve outcomes for justice-involved individuals with behavioral health needs. The pilot program combines traditional co-responder services in the community with jail in-reach activities that identify individuals with mental health or substance use needs during incarceration and connect them with treatment and community supports prior to their release. Ms. Bell noted that the model is intended to improve continuum of care, reduce recidivism, and support successful reentry into the community.

Ms. Bell concluded her presentation by discussing a proposed tiered funding approach which is currently under evaluation. Under the proposed model, state funding would gradually decrease over a four-year period while local investment would increase, moving from a 75% state-funded/25% local-funded structure in Year One to 100% local funding by Year Four. She explained that the approach is intended to promote long-term sustainability, reduce dependency on state funding, and encourage programs to develop diversified funding streams through local partnerships, grants, and Medicaid reimbursement opportunities.

Ms. Bell asked if there were any questions from the Board members, after hearing none, she left the podium.

Commissioner Tanner then invited Orion Mowbray, Ph.D., Executive Director and Professor for the David Ralston Institute for Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities at the University of Georgia, to provide an overview of the Ralston Institute and its ongoing initiatives. Dr. Mowbray explained that the Institute was established in 2024 and is housed within the University of Georgia's College of Family and Consumer Sciences. Named in honor of the late Speaker David Ralston, the Institute was created to improve behavioral health and developmental disability systems throughout Georgia by serving as a statewide hub connecting research, practice, education, and public policy.

Dr. Mowbray discussed the Institute's primary areas of focus, which include behavioral health and criminal justice, community-based care and housing, workforce development, peer support, and developmental disability services. He also stated that the Institute supports agencies, providers, and communities through data analysis, program evaluation, evidence-based practice implementation, workforce development initiatives, and the creation of publicly accessible tools and resources. He highlighted a few accomplishments achieved during the Institute's first year, including joining the National Behavioral Health Workforce Center Alliance, developing the Georgia Behavioral Health Professions Hub, creating a statewide inventory of behavioral health degree programs, and serving as the evaluation entity for the Georgia Opioid Abatement Trust.

Dr. Mowbray also shared several upcoming initiatives, including the Justice-Focused Behavioral Health Extension Network, a partnership between the Ralston Institute and the University of Georgia Extension System designed to embed behavioral health extension agents within communities across Georgia. He explained that the initiative will focus on prevention, early intervention, and strengthening coordination between behavioral health and justice systems before crises occur. He also highlighted efforts to expand behavioral health supports within Georgia schools through statewide training, student advocacy initiatives, trauma-informed practices, and early identification efforts. Lastly, Dr. Mowbray discussed the Institute's work to improve access to services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities through standardized waiver assessments, technical assistance, training, and evaluation activities aimed at improving service access, transparency, and outcomes for individuals and families.

Dr. Mowbray concluded his presentation by outlining the Institute's long-term vision for success, emphasizing on the importance of collaboration and partnership in strengthening Georgia's behavioral health and developmental disability systems, expanding access to services, improving workforce capacity, increasing support in rural communities, and improving outcomes for individuals and families throughout the state.

Dr. Mowbray thanked Commissioner Tanner for his commitment to advancing research, workforce development, program evaluations and providing innovative solutions aimed at improving outcomes for individuals with behavioral health and developmental disability needs across Georgia. He expressed his appreciation for the partnership between the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities and the Ralston Institute and stated that he looks forward to the Institute's continued growth and success.

Dr. Mowbray asked the Board members if they had any questions, after seeing none, he thanked the Board members for the opportunity to present and left the podium.

Commissioner Tanner then approached the podium to provide a 2026 Legislative and Budget Update. Commissioner Tanner reviewed key budget investments and adjustments impacting the Department and highlighted funding initiatives supporting behavioral health services, developmental disabilities services, forensic services, crisis response programs, housing supports, workforce development, and hospital capacity expansion. He also discussed investments aimed at improving access to care and strengthening services for individuals and families across Georgia.

Commissioner Tanner provided an overview of pending agency legislation, including Senate Bill 535 and House Bill 1097, and discussed the anticipated impact of the legislation on service delivery, provider oversight, accountability measures, and the state's behavioral health system.

Lastly, Commissioner Tanner highlighted the continued partnership between DBHDD and the University of Georgia's Ralston Institute, including recent investments to expand behavioral health training, workforce development efforts, and resources for schools and communities throughout Georgia.

Commissioner Tanner then transitioned into the Board Engagement portion of the agenda, informing the Board members that the General Assembly recognized former Representative James A. "Bubber" Epps by dedicating Interstate 16 and State Route 96 interchange in Twiggs County as the "Representative Bubber Epps Interchange" through House Resolution 1526.

Commissioner Tanner also thanked the Board members who attended the Department of Justice Milestone Celebration, recognizing the Department's successful release of another portion of the Department of Justice Settlement.

Commissioner Tanner closed his report.

Chairman's Report

Chair Lasa Joiner thanked the presenters for their informative overviews and presentations to the Board. She acknowledged the Department's ongoing efforts to address service gaps and improve outcomes for individuals with behavioral health and developmental disability needs across Georgia. Chair Joiner stated that she was encouraged by the continued progress and momentum within Georgia's behavioral health community and noted that it serves as a reflection of the work being carried out daily by the Department and its partners.

Chair Joiner also congratulated Dr. Jean Sumner, Dean of Mercer University School of Medicine, on her recent recognition as a Rural Health Care Champion of the Year and thanked her for her continued contributions to improving healthcare access in Georgia's rural communities.

Chair Joiner concluded by thanking Commissioner Tanner for his budget presentation, congratulating him and the Department on its release from an additional portion of the Department of Justice Settlement Agreement, and encouraging him to continue leading the Department with strength, vision, and a commitment to improving the lives of Georgians served by DBHDD.

Chair Joiner announced that the next Board meeting date will not be June 11, 2026, and that the meeting will be held on June 18, 2026, and that Chelsee Nabritt will update the Board members calendars and will update the website to reflect the date change as well.

Chair Lasa Joiner closed her report.

Public Comment

There were not any public comments at this meeting.

Adjournment

Chair Lasa Joiner asked if there was any further business for the day, after hearing none, Chair Lasa Joiner asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. A motion was made by David Glass, which was seconded by Jean Sumner, M.D.

The meeting adjourned at 2:12 p.m.

Special Notes

The next scheduled meeting for the Board of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities will be held on **Thursday, June 18, 2026.**

Respectfully submitted by:

Chelsee Nabritt, Board and Special Project Manager

Signatures:



Chair



Secretary