

**Governor's Council on Disability
Quarterly Council Meeting Minutes
February 20, 2026**

Council Members Present/Participating:

Ron Hack (Chair), Steve Ahrens, Wayne Crawford, Betty Davidson, Aaron Durso, Stacey Elster, Katie Jones, Jennifer Meyer, Susan Orton, Jason Schott, Leisa Shelton

Council Members Absent/Not Participating:

Chuck Comstock, Elijah Mayfield, Andrew Sartorius, Bob Wallace.

Staff:

Claudia Browner, Reece Ellis, Laura Mueth, Jenn Pettit.

Guests:

Michelle Anaya (Kansas City region), Representative Dirk Deaton (House Budget Committee Chair), Steven Wright (Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS))

Department Liaisons Present/Participating:

- **Kyle Atkinson** – Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC)
- **Aly Bacon** – Attorney General's Office (AGO)
- **Kim Buckman** – Department of Mental Health (DMH/DD)
- **Greg Caine** – Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE/MSSD)
- **Sara Cleaveland** – Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)
- **Elise Davenport** – Department of Social Services (DSS/MFP)
- **Becky Davis** – Missouri Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH)
- **Raylene Douglas** – Department of Corrections (DOC)
- **Chad Hinkle** – Department of Mental Health (DMH/BH)
- **Phoenix Jenks** – Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- **Joshua Shewmaker** – Department of Revenue (DOR)
- **Kicia Vanzandt** – Department of Social Services (DSS/FSD)
- **Robert Vaughn** – Department of Higher Education & Workforce Dev (DHEWD)
- **Shomari Rozier** – Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS)

Call to Order/Introductions:

Council Chair **Ron Hack** called the meeting to order at **10:01 a.m.** A quorum was established with 11 members in attendance. The meeting was held via WebEx.

- **Approval of Agenda:** The agenda was unanimously approved following a motion by **Betty Davidson** and a second by **Aaron Durso**.
- **Approval of Meeting Minutes:** The Council unanimously approved the meeting minutes for **November 21, 2025**, following a motion by **Jason Schott** and a second by **Steve Ahrens**.

Public Comment:

Michelle Anaya addressed the council as a family advocate from the Kansas City region. She highlighted the over-institutionalization of people with disabilities in Missouri and the lack of oversight in the public administrator/guardianship system. She proposed two specific recommendations:

1. **Meaningful Oversight:** Establishing review mechanisms for placement decisions made by public administrators, possibly through **DMH** or an independent entity.
2. **Statewide Framework:** Developing shared standards for skill-based day services to ensure programs focus on habilitation rather than just supervision.

Chair Hack advised that legislative changes might be necessary for public administrator reform but invited further discussion with the GCD team.

Report from Council Chair – Ron Hack:

Ron noted the importance of the upcoming presentations and urged members to keep questions concise due to the limited time of the guest legislators.

Report from GCD Team:

Council members received the full team report prior to the meeting. Highlights included:

Claudia Browner

- **Wayfinding Technology Project:** The Invitation for Bid (IFB) for wayfinding technology in the State Capitol is now live. Missouri aims to be the first capitol in the nation to implement this for individuals who are blind or have low vision or language barriers.
- **Missouri Master Plan on Aging:** The plan was approved by the Governor; committees are forming to implement recommendations.
- **Budget:** GCD has encumbered **\$12,020 (47%)** of its FY26 expenditure budget.

Laura Mueth

- **Legislative Education Project (LEP):** Two webinars have been held with 100 total attendees; two more are scheduled for March.
- **Capitol Accessibility:** Collaborated with the Disability Policy Coalition to educate senators on making Senate proceedings more accessible (captioning, virtual testimony).
- **Disability Rights Legislative Day:** the planning committee has been preparing for this statewide advocacy event held February 25.

Reece Ellis

- **Youth Leadership Forum (MO-YLF):** Planning is underway for the forum scheduled for **July 14-18, 2026**. Outreach efforts have yielded nine delegate applications so far, a significant increase compared to the same timeframe in previous years.
- Reece will be presenting the annual Inclusion and Youth Leadership awards in place of Claudia at the upcoming **Missouri Rehabilitation Association Conference**.

Jenn Pettit

- **Annual Awards:** Nomination deadline was February 15. Judges will receive materials on February 23 to evaluate **16 Inclusion Award** and **3 Youth Leadership Award** entries. Awards will be presented at the MRA conference in May.

Presentations:

Representative Dirk Deaton – Tax Impacts on Services

Rep. Deaton, Chairman of the House Budget Committee, provided a budget overview as the state transitions from one-time surplus funds to a more challenging fiscal environment.

- **Revenue Outlook:** General revenue adjustments of approximately **\$2 billion** may be needed over the next two years to right-size the budget.
- **Proposed Cuts:** The Governor's recommendations include **\$600 million** in core cuts, including specific rate cuts for **Day Habilitation** and **Self-Directed Services**.

- **Marijuana Revenue:** Clarified that recreational marijuana funds are constitutionally restricted to **DHSS, Public Defenders, and Veterans**; these funds cannot be reallocated to education or disability services by the legislature.

Steven Wright – Show-Me Home (SMH) Program

Steven shared his personal history as an SMH participant and his professional work with the program.

- **Savings:** SMH transitions cost **\$12,000–\$30,000** annually compared to **\$80,000–\$90,000** for nursing home stays. The program has saved Missouri **\$80 million** over 18 years.
- **Housing Barrier:** Missouri currently faces a shortage of **130,000 affordable, accessible housing units**, creating a "bottleneck" for individuals ready to transition out of care.

State Liaison Reports:

- **Kim Buckman (DMH/DD):** Conducting a rate study for Day Rehabilitation and preparing for the impact of the World Cup in Kansas City.
- **Elise Davenport (VR):** She will be leaving her position at the end of the month; she will appoint Lucinda Bishop to take her place.
- **Becky Davis (MCDHH):** Focused on legislative funding for DeafBlind services and a Communication Access bill.
- **Chad Hinkle (DMH/BH):** Applied for a federal National Expansion of Employment Opportunities Network (**NEON**) grant to increase competitive integrated employment for individuals with serious mental illness.
- **Shomari Rozier (DHSS):** Confirmed all 5 regional contractors accepted the 2025 contract amendment, increasing core service payments. The Show-Me Home Region 3 (STL CTY/CO) has a new specialist Barbara Uecker that started February 2, 2026. Barbara is based in Union Missouri but will be responsible for covering all of metro area. Barbara's number is (636) 583-9642
- **Kicia Vanzandt (FSD):** Working is expanding its automated Interactive Voice Response (IVR) project to help clients update information via phone.

Unfinished Business: None

New Business: GCD team will have follow up with Michelle Anaya regarding the issues brought forth in her public comment.

Committee Reports:

- **Advocacy/Employment (Katie Jones):** Discussed autonomous vehicles, accessible voting, and the **Model Employer** annual report now live on the GCD site.
- **Education/Programs (Betty Davidson):** Focused on gaps between school and family transition services and promoted the online Resource Directory.
- **Personnel/Housing (Susan Orton):** Encouraged advocacy for reinstating the helmet law and indicated a report on universal design is forthcoming.

Council Member Reports: None

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at **12:25 p.m.**

Next Meeting: Friday, **May 1, 2026**, at 10 a.m. at the Compass Administrative Building in Jefferson City, MO.

Minutes by Jenn Pettit
2/26/26

Approved by the Council
5/1/26