

January 14, 2026 BHPOC Zoom Meeting

Meeting summary

Quick recap

The meeting began with introductions and featuring Spanish translation services and co-host Heather Gates, who also serves as President and CEO of Community Health Resources. DSS Commissioner Andrea Barton Reeves presented on the impacts of HR1 on DSS benefits, particularly regarding Medicaid and SNAP changes, while discussions covered the Rural Health Transformation Grant and its funding requirements. The conversation ended with updates from various departments and committees regarding behavioral health services, federal grant terminations, and educational initiatives, followed by committee reports.

Next steps

- [DSS \(Comm. Andrea Barton Reeves/Team\): Follow up to provide more information on the progress of the CCBHC and the potential for engaging and paying community health workers, including exploring funding sources \(Medicaid, philanthropic, etc.\).](#)
- [DSS \(Comm./Team\): Continue discussions with Heather and relevant stakeholders to better understand the specific needs of behavioral health providers regarding support for client redetermination processes under HR1 and develop possible solutions.](#)
- [DMHAS \(Rob Haswell/Team\): Issue letters to grant recipients to cease additional billable work under affected SAMHSA grants and continue assessing the impact of grant terminations; provide more detailed public information prior to the next meeting.](#)
- [DMHAS \(Rob/Team\): Follow up with a fuller presentation at the next meeting regarding the specific SAMHSA grants affected and their impacts, after direct provider notification is complete.](#)
- [DSS \(Alexis Mohammed /Team\): Complete fiscal review and provide a full picture of the proposed percentage increase/total amount for behavioral health rates at the next opportunity.](#)
- [Department of Education \(Bryan Klimkiewicz/Team\): Release the competitive grant announcement for the Trauma-Informed Schools Initiative Grant and communicate application details to relevant stakeholders.](#)
- [DE&I Committee \(Alice Forrester/Bernetta Henry/Team\): Finalize and present recommendations regarding the community health worker and peer support specialist roles in behavioral health after the next meeting.](#)
- [CPAC \(Neva Caldwell/Team\): Conduct chair elections in February and begin planning for the 11th annual ICANN Conference 2026, including identifying theme and messaging.](#)
- [Tammy Venenga \(DDS/Team\): Review proposals received for the children's step-down unit RFP starting next week.](#)

- [Tammy \(DDS/Team\): Review responses to the community clinical response team RFP \(posted recently\) and proceed with selection/implementation.](#)
- [Tammy \(DDS/Team\): Draft and issue RFP for community inclusion programs for children with intellectual disabilities, including recreational and respite services.](#)
- [DMHAS \(Rob/Team\): Conduct and complete residential interim program monitoring visits with SUD residential providers, identifying support/technical assistance needs.](#)
- [DMHAS \(Rob/Team\): Review applications for the RFP to expand SUD residential bed capacity and publicize results.](#)
- [DMHAS \(Sabrina/ Trocchi/Rob/Team\): Provide a presentation on the VHH program at the May Adult QAP Comm meeting and update on related social connectedness initiatives.](#)
- [Department of Education \(Bryan/Team\): Provide regular updates on the work of the Transforming Children's Behavioral Health Policy and Planning Committee per HB 5001, Section 14, with a report due January 1, 2027.](#)

Summary

Behavioral Health Partnership Recognition

The meeting began with David Kaplan explaining the Spanish translation services and Heather Gates introducing herself as the President and CEO of Community Health Resources, chairing the meeting in Terri DiPietro's absence. Representative Mike Demicco presented an official legislative citation to Howard Drescher, recognizing his contributions to the Behavioral Health Partnership Oversight Council. Howard expressed gratitude for the recognition and mentioned his decision to step back due to turning 83. The conversation ended with Heather praising Howard's advocacy and dedication to improving the behavioral health system.

HR1's Impact on DSS Benefits

Andrea Barton Reeves, Commissioner of the Department of Social Services, presented on the impacts of HR1 on DSS benefits, covering Medicaid and SNAP changes. She explained that HR1 introduced work requirements for Medicaid recipients, reduced retroactive eligibility periods, and mandated cost-sharing, while also altering SNAP eligibility and work requirements. The presentation highlighted that these changes affect a significant portion of Connecticut's population, with every municipality having Medicaid recipients and food insecurity present in all 169 municipalities.

SNAP and Medicaid Eligibility Changes

The Commissioner presented on the impact of H.R.1 on SNAP and Medicaid eligibility, particularly affecting approximately 4,000 Afghani citizens who were previously eligible for benefits. She outlined DSS's response, including stakeholder engagement, development of a user-friendly pre-screener tool, and staff augmentation to handle increased inquiries. The department is implementing several initiatives, including Opportunity Centers in Hartford to provide comprehensive support for clients, leveraging federal resources for Medicaid work, and modernizing tools for staff.

Rural Health Grant Spending Plans

Heather Gates and the Commissioner discussed the impact of the Rural Health Transformation Grant (see map below), which Connecticut received for \$154 million. The Commissioner explained that the funds must be spent quickly and are intended for various projects including maternal health, integrative care, and senior care. They are still negotiating with CMS about which specific projects to fund. Heather also inquired about support for behavioral health providers and the recent cancellation of SAMHSA grants, which the Commissioner agreed to address in future reports.

SAMHSA Funding Cuts Crisis Response

The meeting focused on the impact of recent funding cuts, particularly affecting SAMHSA contracts and grants that provide critical services including opiate-dependent treatment and trauma treatment in schools. The Commissioner explained that state officials, including the governor's office and Office of Policy and Management, are working to determine next steps in response to these cuts, which have created a crisis for providers supporting people in crisis. The discussion also covered the potential for Medicaid to fund community health workers, with Andrea noting that while a statute allowing for Medicaid payment was passed 2-3 years ago, finding fiscal capacity has been challenging.

HR1 Impact on Social Services

The meeting focused on concerns about the impact of HR1, particularly regarding Medicaid and SNAP changes, with Janine Sullivan-Wiley expressing worries about increased financial burdens on DSS, food pantry capacity, and potential rises in homelessness and public anger. The Commissioner acknowledged these concerns and explained that while the final bill was less damaging than initial proposals, safety protocols and signage have been implemented in DSS offices to protect staff from angry clients, with many staff having personal experience as former benefit recipients.

Behavioral Health Services Update Meeting

The meeting covered updates from various departments and committees. Tammy Venenga from DDS discussed ongoing RFPs for children's behavioral health services, including a step-down unit and community clinical response team. Alexis Mohammed (DSS) provided updates on SUD renewal package public hearings and behavioral health rates. Rob Haswell (DMHAS) reported on federal grant terminations affecting several divisions at DMHAS, with more information to follow. The Department of Education's Bryan Klimkiewicz shared updates on new grants and legislation related to trauma-informed schools and behavioral health issues in special education. Committee reports were provided by Hector Glynn (Child/Adol QAP), Kelly Phenix (Adult QAP), Alice Forrester (DEI BH), and Neva Caldwell (CFAC). The conversation ended with a birthday wish for Howard Drescher and no new business to address.

Here is the link to the SNAP prescreener: <https://portal.ct.gov/dss/snap/able-bodied-adults-without-dependents-or-abawds>

And here is the website for HR 1: https://portal.ct.gov/dss/all-programs/dss-benefits-and-hr1?language=en_US

