



Sloppy Floyd Building, West Tower
200 Piedmont Avenue SE Ste 426, 4th Floor
Atlanta, GA 30334
Main: 404.657.2126
Toll Free: 888.275.4233
TDD: 404.657.2133
www.gcdd.org

Council Meeting
Meeting Minutes
January 22-23, 2026

**COUNCIL
MEMBERS'
PRESENT**

Lynn Ashcraft,
Melissa Barwick,
Brooke
Baumgardner,
Shandria Beasley,
Lori Campbell,
Jessica Cowell,
Mark Crenshaw,
Ben Dell,
Martha Haythorn,
Dayna Holbel,

Tais Keyser,
Dana Lloyd,
Lisa Newbern,
Mariana Ortiz-
Padilla,
Sharifa Peart,
Charity Roberts,
Crystal St. Pierre-
Stackpole,
Jennifer Snyder,
Zolinda Stoneman,
Sharia Stripling-
James,
Leslie Kate
Thornton,

Dave Ward,
Laraleigh Windom,
Steven Wright,

**COUNCIL
MEMBERS
ABSENT**

**GUESTS
PRESENT**
Patricia Nobie
Jennifer LeDenney

**COUNCIL
STAFF
PRESENT**

Felicia Dillon,
Ariel Edwards,
Tonya Fair,
Daisja Johnson,
Brook Kubik,
Charles Miller,
Fanta Mitchell,
Harry Nelson,
Maria Pinkelton,
D'Arcy Rob

Call to Order

- Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities council meeting began on January 22, 2026, at 10:00 am, virtually via Zoom. Council Chair Lisa Newbern called the meeting to order. Ben Dell read the statement of place. A quorum was present.
- Welcome and Introductions:**
 - Introductions were led by Lisa Newbern, Council Chair.
 - Member Shared Agreements were discussed.
 - Council Updates:**
 - New Members:** D'Arcy Robb, Executive Director, introduced the new Council members: Marianna Ortiz-Padilla, Brooke Baumgardner, Steven Wright, Laraleigh Windom, and Lynn Ashcraft.



- **Staffing:** D'Arcy Robb shared staffing news: Brook Kubik went from council member to consultant (contract role). Brook is in this role until April. Upcoming job postings are coming out this spring; they will include a new programmatic and public policy role.
- **Budget:** Harry Nelson, Deputy Director, reported that the deficit outlook is favorable and that he is coordinating with DBHDD to shift certain expenses into Year 4. He noted that if the Public Policy Director and new Program position begin in July, it will positively impact carryover.
 1. D'Arcy Robb informed new members that they will be responsible for approving the budgets discussed and clarified that the conversation focused on how and where funds are being allocated.
- **IPSE Audit:** D'Arcy Robb provided an IPSE update and clarified that GCDD has never operated an IPSE program. She discussed next steps following the audit, including strengthening documentation and processes, and reflected on lessons learned. She also highlighted the IPSE Sustainability Project and the Florida model, noting that UCEDDs lead this work in other states. Additionally, two organizations have expressed interest in assuming this role.
- **Upcoming Executive Committee Vote:** Fanta Mitchell, Membership Coordinator, discussed Executive Committee elections and asked for more nominations from the floor. Dayna Holbel was the only candidate nominated. With no other nominations this will automatically go to Dayna.
- **Save the Dates:** Reviewed upcoming council events.
 1. Advocacy Days: Members are encouraged to attend at least one; travel costs may be covered—contact Fanta for details.
 2. Disability Policy Seminar: March 23-24, 2026
 3. Spring Council Meeting (Atlanta, GA): April 23-24, 2026
 4. Summer Council Meeting (Zoom): July 23-24, 2026
 5. Fall Council Meeting: Planned as in person, with the location to be determined. Suggestions for meaningful venues are welcome.
- Voting items, including Executive Committee elections (if needed), are scheduled for Day 2.

3. Public Policy Updates:

- Charles Miller, Legislative Advocacy Director, and Brook Kubik, Public Policy Consultant, shared the following updates:
- **State Legislative Session Update:**
 - Charles stressed that the remaining 40 days of the session are critical, with the House Human Resources Committee as a key focus for additional waiver funding.

- **GCDD Legislative Agenda Review**

- The three advocacy pillars are preventing harmful IDD cuts to Medicaid, increasing waiver capacity, and strengthening education, with additional focus on enhanced police training.

- **Advocacy Days:** The Advocacy Day on January 28 will focus on 1217 waivers needed and staffing issues. The next Advocacy Day (February 4) will address making IPSE grants permanent and extending DOE requirements for certified teachers in critical areas. He also highlighted the special education staffing shortage and efforts to end GNETS.

- **Upcoming Advocacy Days:**

- NOW/COMP Waivers – January 28, 2026
- K-12 Education – February 4, 2026
- Medicaid – March 4, 2026

- **Public Policy Fellow:** Charles Miller recognized Public Policy Fellow Daisja Johnson for her key contributions; she is pursuing a master's at Clark University and supports a family member with a disability.

- Lisa Newbern, Council Chair, encouraged everyone to advocate at the Capitol for at least one day, and Crystal St. Pierre highlighted including teachers and students in advocacy efforts.

4. **5 Year State Plan – Part 1:**

- **Presentation: 5-Year Plan Draft Goals & Objectives**

- D'Arcy Robb explained that the 5-year plan, focused on individuals with developmental disabilities, will also impact the broader community. Goals and objectives are data-driven building blocks, and the Council's role is advocacy and capacity building, not direct service. This may include training for individuals and families and creating supportive systems. Successful existing activities may not need inclusion at this time.
- Members separated into groups to discuss draft goals and objectives and provide feedback. Council support will be requested in April to release the plan for public comment, with a final vote in July.

5. **Project Updates:**

Major Project Highlights & Questions: Rena Harris, Chief Program Officer, discussed each State Plan Objective, Project and Project Objective. She also provided a quarterly progress update of each GCDD project.

- **Project Spotlight: Uniting for Change:** Lisa Newbern shared that Michelle Schwartz was unable to attend due to personal issues.

6. Meeting End

Call to Order

Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities council meeting resumed on January 23, 2026, via Zoom. Council Chair Lisa Newbern called the meeting to order. A quorum was present.

1. Consent Agenda Items

MOTION: Chair Lisa Newbern reviewed consent items including the minutes from the October 23 – 24 2025, Council Meeting. Lisa Newbern informed the Council that Dayna Holbel is the new member of the Executive Committee.

MADE BY: Dave Ward

SECOND: Jessica Cowell

The motion passed unanimously.

2. 5 Year Plan Part 2 Discussion

- The previous 3 discussion groups reconvened and presented their group's feedback to the council.

3. Agency Reports

- **Lori Campbell, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD):**
 - The Division of DD launched a new electronic Client Record system (Therap) on 1/1/26, improving oversight, data reporting, and critical incident response, with ongoing internal and external training.
 - Six CSBs (Region 1 Avita, Region 2 River Edge, Region 3 Claratel, Region 4 Aspire, Region 5 Gateway, Region 6 Pathways) are building a regional safety net by developing specialized transitional, behavioral, and intensive CRA homes, with training and consultation from Merakey to expand short- and long-term placement options.
 - The Division continues statewide person-centered practice training with Sangha Unity Network, in partnership with Beth Mount through 2027.

- DBHDD is preparing to exit the DOJ Settlement Agreement for Behavioral Health Services, having met most extension requirements; the CSB safety net is expected to address remaining crisis service gaps.
- Ongoing engagement with agencies and self-advocates strengthens services, policy, and PCP training, including participation in the Rise Up–Speak Out Coalition with Sangha Unity Network.
- **Ben Dell, Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA):**
 - GVRA has strengthened its workforce and service delivery, hiring 100+ counselors in the past year for a total of 190 statewide, supported by centralized intake, competitive salaries, and a clear career ladder. Service delivery rose 168.2%, with counselors providing more individualized, consistent client support.
 - Leadership and training were enhanced with Counselor 3 (C3) positions on all teams, while a relaunched paid internship program gives eight interns broad VR experience to prepare for full-time roles.
- **Charity Roberts, Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE):**
 - The Division for Exceptional Children provides technical assistance to LEAs to expand postsecondary graduation opportunities for students with disabilities and increase Career Technical Instruction statewide in partnership with the Department of Education's Office of Career and Technical Education.
 - In partnership with GVRA, the division aims for 100% referral of students with disabilities for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), with a focus on expanding services in rural LEAs.
 - Structured literacy professional learning is being provided for K–12 educators at 18 regional locations. Additionally, LEAs receive free assistive technology tools for students with IEPs through EVAY, including ReadWrite, Equatio, and U-PAR.
 - **Statewide literacy initiative** for students with IEPs to align with HB307, federal statutes/regulations, state laws, and state board rules.
 - **Statewide focus on GVRA referrals** for all students with IEPs to ensure that all students are connected with DBHDD and/or GVRA, if eligible.
 - Access to assistive technology tools by Everway.
 - LEA professional learning and technical assistance on IEP Team.
- **Zolinda Stoneman, Institute on Human Development and Disability (IHDD):**
 - As of January 1, IHDD has transitioned to the Ralston Institute at Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (BHDD) is now Center for Human Development and Disabilities (CHDD). Funding has been allocated for Direct Support Professional (DSP) initiatives. The college will host Alumni Awards in February 2026, where

Commissioner Tanner will be recognized. Ralston Office construction is also underway.

- **Mark Crenshaw, Center for Leadership and Disability (CLD):**

- **Autism Conference & Expo of Georgia (ACE):** May 1, 2026 | Georgia State University
 - Theme: Georgia Grown: From Research to Reality
 - Learn more here: <https://cld.gsu.edu/autism-conference/>
- **Georgia Child Health Conference:** June 15-17, 2026 | Atlanta, Georgia
 - Theme: Best Start Georgia
- **AUCD Leadership Academy:** June 7-12, 2026
 - Learn more by joining a pre-application webinar on January 29. Register Here: <https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/4EmnTRc-QByS5zpvb8TNWA#/registration>

- **Shandria Beasley, Department of Community Health (DCH):**

- DCH is conducting ongoing oversight to ensure providers are consistently meeting setting requirements through monitoring and evaluation, safeguarding participant rights, and promoting quality care and positive outcomes.

- **Melissa Barwick, Department of Human Services (DHS):**

- Starting January 26, the Division of Family and Child Services (DFCS) will pilot an On-Demand SNAP interview process. Instead of scheduling a telephone interview, applicants can now complete their application and connect immediately with a caseworker. This aims to speed up eligibility decisions, improve benefit distribution, and increase customer satisfaction.

- **Sharifa Peart, Department of Public Health (DPH):**

- DPH Child Health Conference is scheduled for June 14-17th in Stone Mountain, Georgia
- Families, early intervention providers, public health nurses and social workers, and community partners are welcome.

- **Dana Lloyd, Georgia Advocacy Office (GAO):**

- We are hosting a small group of spring interns and externs, providing undergrad and graduate students opportunities to gain skills while supporting projects, callers, and GAO staff.

- The US House Appropriations bill proposes level funding for all Protection and Advocacy (P&A) programs, including PAVA.
- We raised concerns about GVRA's low employment outcomes for individuals with I/DD; GVRA will attend the upcoming DBHDD I/DD Supported Employment meeting.
- GAO's GNETS case was dismissed, but we continue to support DOJ's ongoing case.

4. **Committee Updates:**

- **Public Policy Committee:** Senate approved the budget today and Advocacy Days are approaching.
- **Grants Selection Committee:** The previous Notice of Funding Available was awarded to Georgians for a Healthy Future. The current Notice of Funding Available is posted to DD Suites for Get out the Vote/Civic Engagement. There are 7 applications and 3 submissions. The committee is creating a more accessible voting process for the committee.
- **State Plan Committee:** The State Plan Committee has 2 matters to address related to funding for Project SETA and United for Change which requires additional information. The committee will meet Monday to revisit these matters.

Adjourn

MOTION: Chair Lisa Newbern called to adjourn the meeting on Friday, January 23, 2026, at 12:38 pm.

MADE BY: Crystal St. Pierre-Stackpole

SECOND: Martha Haythorn

The motion passed unanimously.

Lisa Newbern

Lisa Newbern (Jun 29, 2026 16:03:48 EDT)

Council Chair

Approved: 4/24/2026