



NORTH COUNTRY

COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH

MINUTES OF THE BOARD

May 21, 2026 2:30 PM

North Country Community Mental Health

1420 Plaza Drive, Petoskey, Board Room

Mr. Ginop called the meeting to order at 2:30 PM

ROLL CALL:

BOARD MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Aimee Bissonette, Annemarie Conway, Bob Baldwin, Dale Eschenburg, Dan CasaSanta, Dave White, Ed Ginop, Jarris Rubingh, Mike Newman, Bob Boyd, Ron Iseler, Sarah Bronson

MEMBERS ATTENDING VIRTUALLY: None

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: Dana Wingo, Ed Belitz

STAFF: Brian Babbitt, Nancy Rhue, Tim Stapp Jr., Ann Friend, Kim Rappleyea, April Johnson, Katherine Brodie, Kelly Smith, Kirstie Brady, Amy Christie, Suzan Petee-Eubank, David Hornibrook, Lauren Myers, Katie Somers, Katie Lorence, Sam Kerr, Meghan Grebe, Jennifer Pewinski, Andrea Rose, Tiffany Kiper, Elizabeth Shirley, Brandy Marvin, Laurie Griffee, Juia Perry, Carole Merritt-Doherty, Dominique Cook, Barb Woodhams

GUESTS: GTI Mancelona, Jessica Shrum, Keri Laporte-Montero, Amy Carter, Cindy, "J", Tracy Trasky. Ivy Macnicol, Carolyn Johnson, "BK", Brian Greene, Dorothy Felton, Micah Haven, Debra Niswander, John Sweet, Multiple unidentified community members

Mr. Ginop welcomed board members and staff to the meeting. There is a quorum present.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST: No board members expressed a conflict with any agenda item.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Micah Haven Read this statement: Bridge Michigan recently published a lengthy article about the closure of Bergmann Center titled, "*Some fear 'domino effect' as disabled adults lose lifeline in northern Michigan.*" Since that article was released, GTI has had many conversations with concerned parents, guardians, and clients asking what the future holds for programs like ours. I want to be clear that GTI is not in the same financial position as Bergmann Center. However, what deeply concerns our organization is the direction North Country appears to be moving in as a replacement for full-day, center-based services like those GTI provides. At the recent quarterly provider meeting, North Country announced that individuals who formerly attended Bergmann Center are only being offered Community Living Support services as a replacement for the services they lost. While CLS workers can absolutely play an important role in supporting people with disabilities, a few hours of staffing to go shopping or visit a park is simply not comparable to a full day of center-based programming like what GTI provides in Mancelona. Center-based programs like ours are not just filling time. They are building skills, friendships, and purpose. Our team members are part of a community where they feel safe, known, and challenged to

grow. Families choose our center-based model for their loved ones because it provides consistency, meaningful activities, social connection, and the opportunity to earn a paycheck. While it may be more cost effective to provide fewer hours of service in the greater community instead of a full day of programming, cost alone cannot be the deciding factor here. When Bergmann Center closed, people lost far more than a building. Many lost a sense of identity, belonging, and daily purpose. If programs like GTI disappear, it sends the message that these individuals do not matter. So I urge this board to protect your clients' chosen supports, whether that is a full day of center-based programming or a few hours a week of CLS services. Please do not allow valuable programs like GTI to be gradually replaced by cheaper, less meaningful alternatives. Your clients deserve more than the bare minimum. They deserve places where they can truly belong, contribute, and thrive. Finally, I would also like to reiterate what GTI's CEO stated during the last public comment: GTI remains willing to help address the needs created by the closure of Bergmann Center. However, at this time, we have not been contacted by North Country about helping provide services for the individuals who lost supports, and we find that deeply disheartening.

Brian Greene: Please see attached statement

John Sweet attended Bergmann Center and asked when it will be back open. His sister said now his days are disrupted. When he would go to Bergmann Center, he would say he can't wait for Monday on the weekend before he was even dressed. She states that John can't just up and walk out peer to peer in the community. She demanded an answer to John's question.

Debra Niswander asked that when the discussion regarding Bergmann Center happens later in the meeting if the DCW passthrough would be discussed and asked for written documentation regarding the passthrough. She states that from what she has read that NCCMH is doing it wrong. She states that it is her understanding that if Bergmann Center pays their staff \$16.50 that NCCMH must fund Bergmann Center at \$16.50 plus the \$3.40 DCW passthrough on top of it.

Phyllis Priest is a parent of multiple Bergmann Center clients; she states that they used to attend NCEC. She states that this is the Second program to close. She states there is no comparison to Bergmann center, offered services are not comparable and not the same as having their friends with them. She states that NCCMH states that they would try to keep friend groups together, but all of her children have different friend groups.

CONSENT AGENDA

The consent agenda includes the agenda overview, minutes of the previous meeting, privileging recommendations and contracts signed in the past month. Items requiring approval will be placed on the meeting agenda.

MOTION BY BOB BOYD TO APPROVE THE CONSENT AGENDA; SUPPORT BY RON ISELER: MOTION CARRIED

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS – BOARD ACTION*:

Program Committee: Mr. Iseler reviewed the minutes of the April 23, 2026 meeting. Items on the agenda included approval of the previous meeting's minutes, the FY25 Customer Services, Grievances, and Appeals Report, and the Annual Needs Assessment Report.

Finance Committee Report: Mr. White reviewed the Statement of Cash on Deposit and Disbursements through April 30 2026, Interim Financial Statements as of March 31, 2026, Revenue and Expense by Fund Source; Trending Revenue and Expenses as of March 31, 2026, and the NMRE interim financial report.

Mr. Ginop requested the financial reports be placed on file for audit.

PRESENTATION – Regulatory Compliance – Kim Rappleyea - The Board received and participated in the annual Corporate Compliance training presentation. The training provided an overview of the organization's compliance program, including the OIG's Seven Elements of an Effective Compliance Program, key federal and state regulatory requirements, and current enforcement trends impacting behavioral health providers.

Topics included fraud, waste, and abuse; the False Claims Act; Anti-Kickback Statute; HIPAA privacy and security requirements; and common risk areas specific to behavioral health services. The training also emphasized the Board's responsibility and duty of care in overseeing the effectiveness of the compliance program. Board members acknowledged their role in promoting a culture of compliance and ensuring appropriate governance and accountability.

ACTION ITEMS WITHOUT COMMITTEE REVIEW: Minutes of the April 27 Executive Committee and Minutes of the May 1 closed session were reviewed by the board.

MOTION BY ANNMARIE CONWAY TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE APRIL 27, 2026 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AS PRESENTED; SUPPORT BY DAVE WHITE:

ROLL CALL:

AYE: RON ISELER, DAN CASASANTA, SARAH BRONSON, DAVID WHITE, BOB BALDWIN, AIMEE BISSONETTE, DALE ESCHENBURG, JARRIS RUBINGH, MIKE NEWMAN, ANNEMARIE CONWAY, BOB BOYD, ED GINOP

NAY: NONE

ABSENT: DANA WINGO, ED BELITZ

MOTION CARRIES

MOTION BY JARRIS RUBINGH TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MAY 1, 2026 CLOSED SESSION AS PRESENTED; SUPPORT BY BOB BOYD:

ROLL CALL:

AYE: DAVE WHITE, MIKE NEWMAN, AIMEE BISSONETTE, BOB BOYD, DAN CASASANTA, JARRIS RUBINGH, ANNEMARIE CONWAY, BOB BALDWIN, DALE ESCHENBURG, SARAH BRONSON, RON ISELER, ED GINOP

NAY: NONE

ABSENT: DANA WINGO, ED BELITZ

MOTION CARRIES

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT/COMMUNICATIONS: Mr. Babbitt referred to several items in his report. On April 21 he had a meeting with the Autism Association of Michigan. On May 6 he and Ms. Friend met with Crossroads Industries. He states that there is an issue with absenteeism and they are looking at ways to stabilize that. They have put their downtown building up for sale and are looking at alternative places for services. On May 8 Mr. Babbitt had a meeting with Chip Johnston, CEO of Centra Wellness, and Sheriff Hoch in Bellaire regarding CIT. Mr. Johnston has been funding a CIT trained officer in one of his counties with Rural Transformation Funds and Health Endowment Funds. If NCCMH can secure 3-year funding, we could fund an officer specifically for CIT, Sheriff Hoch is encouraged by this and receptive to this. Grants are currently in process. This ties in with the new public safety center. This is currently in the works for Antrim County but the broader thought is to incorporate 4 or 5 counties in this program. On My 13 Mr. Babbitt attended the CIT convening at Kirtland Community College. On May 14 he met with the union in Bellaire for contract negotiations. On May 18 he attended the MDHHS exit interview for the NMRE. It was overall positive and changes implemented were noted, a CAP will be required.

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT UPDATE – None

NORTHERN MICHIGAN REGIONAL ENTITY- The minutes of the March Operations meeting, March Interim Financials, and draft minutes of the April Board Meeting were included in the packet.

OLD BUSINESS – Bergmann Center Update – Mr. Babbitt drew attention to a rate analysis included in the packet that was based on information Mike Hurchick gave at the last meeting, what Ms. Laporte-Montero delivered in a Legislative Briefing document, and NCCMH's rate development. In all 3 scenarios based on the claims dollars paid in FY26 through March, Bergmann Center would have money left over for discretionary expenditures. Mr. Babbitt states that he has been a vocal advocate to legislature that they look at the DCW passthrough differently as it is creating wage compression in agencies.

Mr. Cooke then gave a summary report of the issues associated with the 30 day notice of termination of services and allegations of impropriety against NCCMH from Ms. Laporte-Montero. He states that the issues raised are misplaced or unfounded criticisms of NCCMH which is why a Demand to Retract was issued. She has not done so but continued to portray NCCMH in a false light to the public, legislators, and consumers. A communication sent to consumers on May 7, 2026 by Ms. Laporte-Montero is inflammatory and borders on obstructive of NCCMH's obligation to find alternate providers for clients.

Mr. Rubingh asked why no referrals were sent to GTI as Mr. Haven stated.

Mr. Babbitt said there have been referrals and he was surprised that Mr. Haven stated there were none.

Mr. Baldwin asked about the transitional funds that were appropriated, stating “it’s been a year and none of the programs have received the funding” and asked about the Kaskaska County Transit contract.

Mr. Babbitt clarified that the transitional funds were not voted on a year ago, that the motion for the funds included that policy and procedure would be created by NCCMH staff. The application and guidelines went through the program committee at the beginning of November and were shared with the board at November’s meeting. The application and letter with criteria went out to the programs at the beginning of December, first applications were received in January. He explained the timeline and bulk of Bergmann Center’s request, and that funds are being distributed to programs with approved applications. He reiterated that Medicaid dollars must be used for approved expenses and cannot be given for expenses that will not be incurred. Non-renewal of the Kaskaska transit contract was discussed and Mr. Babbitt reiterated that it was not intentional to let that contract lapse without an alternative in place.

NEW BUSINESS – CMHA Summer Conference- Board members wanting to attend should contact Ms. Rhue to register.

PUBLIC COMMENT – Micah Haven stated that he appreciated Bob and Dale who have come to check out GTI. He offered other board members to come check out GTI’s program and to carry on services for people who are valuable.

Debra Niswander said she doesn’t think that anyone is trying to put the blame on only one person. She stated that sometimes we have so many other things we are working on and Day Programs are relief. They work on employment and skill building. Being in the community every day is not something that should be so pushed. She stated that she has to take some blame as well. People have to stop pushing blame, get over egos, and put our heads together. She states that she is going to go to Bergmann Center’s board meeting and they will get the same attitude. She states that we need to help the people.

Brian Green asked if the board is going to recommend a meeting to Bergmann Center. He stated that Bergmann Center has fault as well. He states that he did some research and Day programs have a formula that works with 75% state and federal funding and 25% donor funding. Other revenue streams do need to be found, but he believes there has been a cascade of events that resulted in this.

Mr. Ginop stated that there needs to be a cooling off period.

Someone stated that “the cards seem stacked in NCCMH’s deck”

BOARD & STAFF COMMENTS –

Ms. Conway stated that it is hard sitting here knowing what is going on and trying to work with the programs. She asked the public here to look at NCCMH as the waiters, not the cooks. Legislators are the cooks, they make the rules and NCCMH has to “serve those rules.” She states that she found out from the Transit director that Bergmann Center was closing before the notice was even delivered to NCCMH and the Board. She said we have to respect each other and stop the anger. We want to work for the people, it does not need to be a dead issue, but statutorily NCCMH has to work in a certain way due to rules and regulations.

Mr. Iseler explained that with the most recent RFP that was threatening the public mental health system, how NCCMH fought to keep the CMH system from being turned over to the for-profit health systems. He also took offense with the general accusations that the board members don't care. He explained that when the state hospitals were closed in MI that he and his wife volunteered and helped a person who was released. He stated that he was concerned about Bergmann Center's finances, and it bothered him that Bergmann Center was bringing in clients and pointing at NCCMH Board members and staff telling them "These are the people who are shutting down your program and who are going to make you homeless" He agreed that clients advocating for themselves and their programs is important, but accusing the Board and NCCMH of shutting down Bergmann Center is not right.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 5:06 PM by Board Chair Edward Ginop



Ed Ginop, Board Chair