

MEETING OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY COUNCIL (PSC) FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE, MENTAL HEALTH, & SUBSTANCE ABUSE

A meeting of the Public Safety Council for Criminal Justice, Mental Health, & Substance Abuse (hereafter referred to as the PSC) was held on Friday, May 23, 2025, at 12:00 PM in Conference Room B1-501 of the County Administration Building B, 1800 27th Street, Vero Beach, Florida. You may hear an audio of the meeting and review the agenda on the IRC website at www.ircgov.com/Boards/PSC/2024.

PSC Members Present

Eric Flowers, Chairman, Indian River County Sheriff
Ann Berner, SE Florida Behavioral Health Network (SEFBHN)
Nicole Menz, County Judge
Suzanne Caudell, Director, Comprehensive Offender Rehab & Education
Kent Campbell, IRC Sheriff's Office (IRCSO) Deputy Chief Correctional Officer
Carrie Lester, Thrive IRC
Shaun Leydon, Treasure Coast Community Health
David E. Currey, Vice Chairman, Chief of Vero Beach Police Department
Rayme Nuckles, Treasure Coast Homeless Services (TCHS)
Joseph Flescher, Commissioner
Nathan Peterson, Chief Probation Officer, FL DJJ

PSC Members Absent

Shaun Leydon, Treasure Coast Community Health
Thomas Bakkedahl, State Attorney
Nikhol Primm, County Judge
Tony Barcellona, Substance Awareness Center
Mike Davis, FL Dept of Corrections
Dedilia Finlayson, Detention Facility Director, FL DJJ
Carol Martin, Director of Consumer Services, Mental Health Assoc. of IRC
Valerie Smith, National Alliance on Mental Illness
William Wims, President/CEO, New Horizons Treasure Coast
Diamonda Litty, Public Defender's Office
Charles A. Schwab, Chief Circuit Court Judge
Joseph Cracchiola, FL Department of Corrections

Others Present

Angela Rosado-Jones, IRCSO
Vicki Soule, Treasure Coast Community Health Inc.
George Lynch, Dynamic Life Vero
Kyleigh Motiwala, Substance Awareness Center of IRC
Demetria Williams, Take Flight Counseling & Consulting
Meredith Egan, United Way of Indian River County

IRC Staff

Susan Prado, County Attorney
Ashley Brown, Recording Secretary

Call to Order

Chairman Flowers unofficially called an informational meeting to order at 12:04 pm; a quorum was not present.

With the addition of a committee member, Chairman Flowers called the meeting to order at 12:15 pm; a quorum was present.

Approval of the PSC Minutes for November 22, 2024

ON A MOTION BY Joseph Flescher, SECONDED by Kent Campbell, the members voted unanimously (11-0) to approve the November 22, 2024 minutes.

Election of Chairman

ON A MOTION BY David Currey, SECONDED by Rayme Nuckles, the members voted unanimously (11-0) to elect Carrie Lester as Chairman.

Election of Vice-Chairman

ON A MOTION BY Joseph Flescher, SECONDED by Kent Campbell, the members voted unanimously (11-0) to elect Nicole Menz as Vice-Chairman.

Report from Indian River County Opioid & Substance Use Task Force (K. Motiwala)

Kyleigh Motiwala, Thrive's Director of Data and Outcomes, provided an update to the Council on the work and progress of the Indian River County Opioid & Substance Use Task Force, following the recent adoption of a County resolution supporting the Task Force's formal involvement in informing opioid settlement fund allocations.

Background:

- The Task Force was established following a countywide needs assessment conducted through focus groups, community surveys, and public data.
- Initial findings identified significant barriers for individuals with opioid and substance use disorders in accessing treatment and support services.
- Strategic planning meetings were conducted from November through February to develop countywide goals and priorities.

Task Force Composition:

The Task Force includes representatives from:

- Indian River County Hospital District
- Cleveland Clinic
- Treasure Coast Community Health
- Mental Health Collaborative
- United Way
- Indian River County School District
- Florida Department of Health
- Community representatives

Key Strategic Priorities:

1. Addressing Stigma and Increasing Public Awareness:

- The needs assessment identified stigma and lack of understanding surrounding substance use disorder as major barriers.
- Proposed solutions include:
- Funding for education initiatives and stigma-reduction efforts
- Training programs for first responders, healthcare providers, schools, and community members
- Peer-to-peer support models
- Countywide public awareness campaigns

2. Enhancing Access to Integrated Care and Support Services:

- The county lacks a coordinated system for recovery and access to services.
- Recommended actions include:
- Development of transitional housing and stabilization programs (e.g., 3–7 day respite for non-detox eligible individuals)
- Incentivizing provider engagement and establishing a coordinated intake/referral system
- Expansion of the peer support workforce
- Strengthening crisis response and overdose prevention efforts

- Improving jail-to-community transitions and reentry support
- Creation of a comprehensive countywide service and resource directory
- Building a sustainable recovery support network

Purpose Moving Forward:

Ms. Motiwala emphasized that the Task Force's role is to serve as a data-driven advisory body to guide funding and programming decisions related to the opioid settlement. The group aims to support implementation of these strategic priorities and to offer actionable recommendations as the Council moves forward.

Status & Performance Updates for Mental Health Court Program (S. Leydon)

The Council received an update on the operational and funding status of the Mental Health Court Program.

Program Status and Operational Updates:

- Applications for funding have been submitted to both the Indian River County General Fund and the Hospital District.
- The Hospital District has recently revised its funding process and is transitioning from lump-sum disbursements to a fee-for-service model. As a result, there is uncertainty regarding the level of funding that may be approved. Final determinations are expected by the end of September.
- Despite limited resources, the program continues to operate under high demand. On a recent Tuesday, there were 13 individuals in jail who were also participants in Mental Health Court, and four required immediate placement in group homes. Only one of the four had been successfully placed due to limited housing availability.

Key Cost Drivers and Challenges:

- Housing and case management represent the two largest expenses.
- Housing individuals in group homes costs approximately \$850 per month, which is less than the cost of eight days in jail (approximately \$120/day).
- Many individuals have co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders, complicating care needs and placement.
- There is more demand for group home placements than available space.

Operational Improvements:

- Sean Leydon, recently appointed through Treasure Coast Community Health, is leading improvements in oversight and efficiency.

- New Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) are being established with group home managers.
- Spot checks and standards are now in place to monitor group home quality and accountability.
- Greater emphasis is being placed on cost-sharing, ensuring individuals who are able to contribute to housing costs are doing so.
- Data tracking and outcome measurement initiatives are underway to demonstrate the program's return on investment.

Funding Discussion:

In addition to the local funding applications, Ms. Berner confirmed that \$305,000 from prior opioid abatement settlement funds has been allocated specifically for problem-solving courts in Indian River County, including Mental Health Court. This funding was approved by the County Commission and is managed by Southeast Florida Behavioral Health Network on behalf of the 19th Judicial Circuit.

This funding is separate from current-year allocations and offers short-term relief but does not fully meet the program's ongoing operational needs.

Closing Remarks:

- The speakers emphasized that the Mental Health Court is not merely a courtroom program, but a comprehensive support system that operates daily.
- The program has been bare-boned to reduce costs and focus on core needs. Some services, such as portions of New Horizons programming, have already been reduced or unfunded to remain within budget constraints.
- There is strong belief among stakeholders, including the Public Defender's Office, that with additional funding, more individuals could be safely diverted from jail into appropriate care—resulting in better outcomes and lower overall costs.

Action Items / Next Steps:

- Monitor outcome of Hospital District application process (decision anticipated by end of September).
- Continue coordination with Southeast Florida Behavioral Health Network regarding current and future opioid settlement funds.
- Track outcome data and return-on-investment metrics through Treasure Coast Community Health's program lead.
- Engage with County and community stakeholders to raise awareness of program needs and impact.

Commissioner's Matters

Commissioner Flescher addressed the Council to provide an update on recent action taken by the Board of County Commissioners regarding the structure of public safety advisory bodies in Indian River County. He noted the following:

Historically, the County has maintained two separate public safety committees:

1. The Public Safety Coordinating Council (PSCC), required under Florida Statute §951.26
2. The Public Safety Council (PSC), required under Florida Statute §394.657

Commissioner Flescher explained that one of the two bodies meets regularly and is active, while the other has not convened on a consistent basis. Given the overlapping missions and functions of the two councils, the County Commission recently took formal action to streamline operations.

At the May 20, 2025, Board of County Commissioners meeting, a resolution was adopted to dissolve the PSCC and merge its responsibilities into the existing PSC. This change was made to:

- Eliminate redundancy
- Improve efficiency
- Ensure continued compliance with state requirements
- Better support community needs related to public safety and behavioral health

Commissioner Flescher then introduced Deputy County Attorney Susan Pratt, who provided legal clarification on the merger.

Deputy County Attorney Susan Prado elaborated on the statutory framework and process:

- Florida law allows for the merger of the PSCC into the PSC under §394.657, provided that the combined body fulfills the requirements of both statutes (§951.26 and §394.657).
- The resolution adopted on May 20, 2025, officially designates the PSC as the single governing body responsible for both sets of statutory duties.
- The PSC must meet at least quarterly, per statutory requirements, which it is already doing.
- The membership composition of the PSC will continue to be monitored to ensure it aligns with the guidelines for both bodies. The existing structure is already in general compliance, and only minor adjustments may be needed going forward.

The Council expressed appreciation for the clarification and acknowledged the benefits of the consolidation. They acknowledged the successful consolidation of the Public Safety Coordinating Council into the Public Safety Council and committed to maintaining compliance with all relevant statutory obligations.

Committee Members Matters

Suzanne Caudell raised concerns about the gap in identifying individuals eligible for Mental Health Court at the time of sentencing. She noted that individuals are often placed on probation when they might have

been more appropriate candidates for Mental Health Court, citing histories of Baker Acts and behavioral health challenges.

Ms. Caudell suggested the need for a better mechanism or earlier intervention to divert appropriate individuals into Mental Health Court prior to sentencing to avoid setting them up for failure.

Judicial Response:

Judge Menz clarified that once an individual has been sentenced to probation, Mental Health Court cannot be added post-sentencing without violating sentencing limitations. The only exception would be if the individual violates probation, at which point Mental Health Court could be recommended during re-sentencing. He noted this approach has been increasingly utilized in recent months.

It was further explained that recommendations made by probation officers can influence decisions, and such feedback is reviewed by both the State Attorney's Office and the Court. While not always followed, strong recommendations from those most familiar with the individuals carry weight.

Mental Health Court Caseload & Housing Challenges:

Judge Menz and committee members discussed the increasing number of participants in Mental Health Court who are also facing housing insecurity, with a record number currently in jail due to lack of suitable housing options, particularly group homes or supervised living environments.

Of the current caseload, 13 individuals remain in jail, with an additional 4 awaiting group home placement.

The definition of a "group home" was clarified to mean any roof-over-head situation, although some homes offer medication management and in-home supervision.

Housing constraints are resulting in more individuals being placed in group homes in St. Lucie County, which presents logistical and cost challenges since services are primarily located in Indian River County. Mental Health Court must then cover transportation costs, adding to program expenses.

Key Points:

- The organization is reaching a critical financial strain, continuing to subsidize housing and cover damages to maintain placements.
- Many individuals housed earn under \$850/month, making sustainable housing nearly impossible without subsidy.
- Court is currently maxed out in funding, with few willing landlords and damage costs falling solely on the organization.
- Concerns were expressed that without more funding or landlord incentives, more individuals may end up homeless or incarcerated.
- Emphasized the public safety benefit of stable housing and encouraged reconsideration of county jail funding allocations to potentially support housing efforts as a preventative measure.

Committee Discussion:

Members acknowledged the critical link between housing and successful mental health treatment.

There was general consensus that better diversion protocols, earlier identification, and enhanced housing support are necessary to improve outcomes.

Questions were raised regarding the potential for court assistance in addressing property damages, which may deter landlord participation.

The Council recognized the urgent need for increased housing resources and inter-agency coordination to address gaps in diversion and mental health court access. Several members expressed support for exploring creative solutions, funding shifts, and policy improvements to better serve this vulnerable population and reduce recidivism.

Chairman's Matters

Chairman Lester addressed upcoming meeting dates and reminded committee members that the next Public Safety Council meeting is scheduled for August 22nd. She emphasized the importance of the work that remains ahead and encouraged continued engagement and collaboration as the Council moves forward.

Public Discussion Items

Meredith Egen of United Way raised a concern regarding the lack of a defined mechanism for managing opioid settlement funds beyond the first year of implementation. She acknowledged the urgency with which the funds were allocated in the initial year but emphasized the need to establish a formalized process moving forward. Ms. Egen offered United Way's support in creating an application template or facilitating an online application process. She clarified that while United Way would not be a recipient of the funds, many of their funded partners may apply, and the organization is willing to assist in streamlining the process to ensure timely and efficient distribution.

Ann Berner, representing the Southeast Florida Behavioral Health Network, agreed with the need for a structured approach and suggested that she and Ms. Egen meet outside of the Council to further develop a framework. Ms. Berner proposed that they work together to outline expenditures to date, forecast anticipated funding, and create a process for application and review ahead of the next funding cycle. She assured the group that this would be completed well in advance of the next meeting to prevent delays.

Council members expressed support for the collaboration and the proactive planning efforts, noting the importance of having materials and recommendations prepared in a timely manner to avoid disruptions in funding allocation.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:56 pm.

The next meeting of the PSC is scheduled for **August 22nd, at 12:00 PM**, in Building B, Conference Room B1-501, at 1800 27th Street, Vero Beach, FL.