

RIVERSIDE UNIVERSITY HEALTH SYSTEM-BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Behavioral Health Commission – Legislative Committee

Wednesday, January 7, 2026

MEMBERS PRESENT	MEMBERS ABSENT	PRESENT
- April Smith– Chair, Behavioral Health Commissioner -- Walter Haessler – Commissioner, Mid-County Board Member - Brenda Scott – Commissioner, Mid-County Advisory Board; NAMI Mt. San Jacinto / NAMI California - Melissa Vasquez – Senior Family Advocate, RUHS-BH, Mid-County -Timothy Kirkconnell- Government Relations	James (Tony) Ortego-Older Adult Administrator Rhyan Miller- Integrated Programs Deputy Director -Beatriz Gonzales-BHC Commissioner	- Michelle DeArmond – Government Relations Representative (RUHS-BH) - Sandy Awad – RUHS-BH Administration Support

ITEM	DISCUSSION	ACTION/FOLLOW-UP
CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS	The meeting was called to order at 10:33 AM by April Smith, Chair. - Members exchanged New Year greetings. - No formal announcements were made.	
MEETING MINUTES	The committee reviewed the prior meeting minutes. - Correction noted: Chair’s name updated to April Smith (previously listed as April Jones). - Motion: Minutes approved with the noted correction. Approved by consensus.	
OLD BUSINESS	a) Updates from Tim Kirkconnell - The California Legislature reconvened with 144 bills introduced as of this meeting. - The final deadline for bill submissions is February 20, 2026. - Only two behavioral health–related bills are currently active: AB 96 (Two-Year Bill): Requires peer support specialists to possess a high school diploma or equivalent. AB 277 (Two-Year Bill): Requires behavioral health providers to undergo background checks prior to employment. Discussion:	

	- Members noted that diploma and background check requirements already exist in many certification and employment processes. - Clarification was provided that AB 277 applies primarily to employment, not licensure. - Concerns were raised about potential impacts on peer support specialists with lived experience. - Discussion suggested the bill may be intended to address gaps in unlicensed, community-based, grant-funded, or contractor roles. - It was noted that these bills may later be amended or used as legislative vehicles for other purposes. State Budget Update - The Governor’s proposed budget is expected by January 10, 2026. - The state is facing a budget deficit. - No new taxes are anticipated; potential reallocation of existing funds is expected. - Budget negotiations are anticipated to be challenging. b) NAMI Legislative Updates - Brenda Scott reported that NAMI is awaiting additional bills before issuing formal legislative positions. NAMI typically surveys stakeholders once legislative activity stabilizes. More comprehensive updates are expected by the March 2026 meeting	
NEW BUSINESS	The committee discussed several bills identified through preliminary research: AB 1032: Provides up to 12 behavioral health visits for individuals impacted by wildfires (effective January 1, 2026). AB 73: Black Mental Health Navigator Certification Program. AB 81: Study on women veterans’ mental health. AB 225: Reforms related to state hospital patient trust funds. No formal action was taken; items were noted for future monitoring.	
COMMITTEE UPDATES	- Federal Advocacy Update Brenda Scott shared highlights from recent advocacy meetings in Washington, D.C., including: - Support for national peer support certification initiatives. - Suicide prevention infrastructure funding (e.g., bridge safety barriers). - Advocacy around ACA tax credit extensions. - Promotion of participation in the bipartisan Mental Health Caucus. Care Act / SB 531	

	Discussion revisited SB 531, which sought to expand mental health literacy education into elementary grades. - The bill failed to advance from committee but remains eligible for reconsideration or reintroduction in a future session. SB 43 (5150 Expansion for Substance Use) - Members confirmed that SB 43 is now implemented as of January 1, 2026, following a delayed rollout. - Updates on implementation will continue through the Behavioral Health Commission. Future Agenda Items - Updates requested for the next meeting include: - Governor's Budget impacts on behavioral health - AB 73, AB 225, and SB 43 implementation updates - CARE Court referrals, including expansion to Bipolar I disorder	
NEXT MEETING	Wednesday, March 4, 2026 (Time and format to be confirmed)	
PUBLIC COMMENTS	No public comments	
ADJOURNMENT	The meeting adjourned at 11:10 AM	

FY 25/26 LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ATTENDANCE ROSTER

Present = **P** · Absent = **A** · Medical Leave = **ML**

Members	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN
1. April Smith	A		P		P							
2. Beatriz Gonzalez	A		P		P							
3. Brenda Scott	P		P		P							
4. Dr. Walter Haessler	ML		P		P							
5. Melissa Vasquez	P		P		P							