



## State of New Jersey

PHILIP D. MURPHY  
*Governor*

TAHESHA L. WAY  
*Lt. Governor*

GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ABUSE  
PO Box 345  
TRENTON, NJ 08625-0345

NEIL VAN ESS  
*Acting Chairman*

CELINA LEVY  
*Executive Director*

### MINUTES

#### **Governor's Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse**

**December 12, 2023**

**Attendance:** Neil Van Ess (Chairman), Celina Levy (Executive Director), John Armato (Public Member), Gregg Benson (Public Member), Cornell Williamson (AOC), Jeff Carrick (DCF), Michelle Graham-Lyons (DCA), Herbert Kaldany (DOC), Lu Pereira (DOE), Valerie Mielke (DHS), Rebecca Glinn (DOL), Craig Sashihara (LPS), Noelle Lee-Turner (DMAVA), Allison Samay (NJ President's Council)

#### **Call to Order**

The three hundred and seventy seventh regular meeting of the Governor's Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Acting Chairman Neil Van Ess.

#### **Open Public Meetings Act Statement**

Mr. Van Ess announced that notice of this meeting was provided in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act (N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 – 10:4-21). In addition, Mr. Van Ess stated that public comments were to be provided electronically, through the GCADA website contact portal between the hours of 10am and 1pm on the day of the meeting.

#### **Roll Call**

Katelyn Assenheimer called the roll. Members present and absent were noted for the record. Chairman Van Ess informed the Council that this meeting would be for informational purposes only due to the lack of quorum.

#### **Chairman's Report**

Chairman Van Ess welcomed everyone to the meeting and shared that the Volunteer of the Year Awards is his favorite meeting of the year. He said he was truly grateful that there are individuals such as the ones being honored today along with many others who are part of the is great

## **Presentation: “2023 Volunteer of the Year”**

Sara Thode, Director of Prevention and Planning shared with everyone that the Alliances represent the largest network of community-based anti-drug coalitions in the nation with over 320 Alliances encompassing over 425 municipalities statewide. Ms. Thode stated that these volunteers being honored today have worked to change and save lives within their communities and throughout New Jersey. The County Volunteers of the Year were introduced, and each volunteer will be mailed a framed certificate in recognition of their service.

Ms. Thode announced that Detective Patrick D’Onofrio had been awarded as the 2023 W. Cary Edwards Statewide Volunteer of the Year. Detective Patrick D’Onofrio has been an active member of the Old Bridge Municipal Alliance for 21 years and an Old Bridge Community Policing Officer for 26 years. Det. D’Onofrio has taught DARE and LEAD for 21 years, and he recently completed the LEAD Advanced Instructor training. Det. D’Onofrio oversees drug education programs for all fifth graders in thirteen schools in Old Bridge. He organizes all classes and works with the school system and other Community Policing Officers. Det. D’Onofrio is the primary instructor in seven schools. 650 students in Old Bridge take the LEAD course each year, and through presentations in K-4 grades on various topics, instructors have contact with 3,900 elementary students each school year. In collaboration with the Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey, Det. D’Onofrio gives presentations in the middle schools on internet safety, vaping and marijuana. He also presents at community and parent meetings. Det. D’Onofrio follows up on every overdose incident in Old Bridge. He encourages individuals to meet with Recovery Coaches and he outlines all services that are available during his outreach. In April and October, Det. D’Onofrio hosts two National Medicine Take Back Collections in Old Bridge. This is in addition to presentations and take back events at senior residences as well as promoting use of the drop box that is permanently installed in the Police Station. Det. D’Onofrio’s unwavering commitment to the health and wellbeing of the Old Bridge community makes him a deserving recipient of the 2023 W. Cary Edwards Statewide Volunteer of the Year Award.

Det. D’Onofrio was also presented with a municipal proclamation from Old Bridge Mayor-Elect Debbie Walker.

After the awards presentation, Deputy Director Rebecca Alfaro introduced the First Place Winner of the New Jersey Shout Down Drugs Prevention Concert, Jordan Wilson to share a video performance of his song, “Intervention Intentions”.

## **Executive Director’s Report**

Executive Director Celina Levy thanked PDFNJ Shout Down Drugs contest winner Jordan for his moving performance. She also shared her gratitude to Detective D’Onofrio for his selfless

dedication to his community and also thanked his friends, family, colleagues and dignitaries who joined the meeting today to honor him. She also shared her appreciation to all the volunteers honored at the meeting and across the state.

Ms. Levy stated that GCADA has established long-term sustainability for the Alliance program and has received DMHAS Block Grant Funding expansion.

The next Master Plan Subcommittee meeting will be held on January 24<sup>th</sup> and updates will be provided to the Council in February.

Ms. Levy thanked the Council members for their input and support, the County Coordinators and Alliances for their good work despite the continued challenges and GCADA staff for their strong work ethic, and to Neil Van Ess for his ongoing leadership.

### **Adjournment**

Chairman Van Ess adjourned the meeting at 11:55.