



**Ellen Story Commission on Postpartum Depression  
Supplemental Meeting - January 4, 2022**

**MEETING MINUTES**

Commissioners present: Representative Jim O'Day (co-chair), Senator Joan Lovely (co-chair), Representative Mindy Domb, Representative Liz Miranda, Emma Hunter on behalf of Senator Becca Rausch, Rebecca Butler, Timoria Saba, Nneka Hall, Margarita O'Neill-Arana, Leena Mittal, Joshua Sparrow, Karin Downs

Commissioners absent: Rep. Carole Fiola, Rep. Kim Ferguson, Sen. Bruce Tarr, Sen. Anne Gobi, Sen. John Keenan, Lauren Almeida, Margot Tracy, Jessie Colbert, Lisa Scarfo, Michael Yogman, Samantha Aigner-Treworthy, Kerry LaBounty, Lee Cohen, Julie Johnston, Jayne Singer, Liz Murphy, Nadja Lopez Reilly, Tiffany Moore Simas, Jill Fieleke

- I. Welcome and Introductions
- II. Review of Commissioner Selection Process

Coordinator Ashley Healy welcomed everyone and reminded them that the purpose of the meeting is to discuss the process for commissioner selection. Ms. Healy shared a document that commissioners have previously seen, which outlines the process, as follows:

First, the coordinator notifies commissioners when a seat is open and asks for nominations. Nominations come to coordinator usually via email, from commissioners. Coordinator reaches out to nominee to see if they are interested, and asks for CV and statement of interest. Coordinator forwards materials to co-chairs, and works with candidate to coordinate a time for a virtual interview. Interview is like any other job interview or public servant role, we go over the candidate's background, interest, experience in the field (as individual or advocate). Interviewers see if nominee has questions about the Commission. After the interview, coordinator and co-chairs meet to go over the interview, the materials, and consider the Commission's current needs and whether the person meets these. Then decide whether to accept the applicant or turn it down. If accepted and it is an appointed seat, we send a letter to the governor recommending the appointment.

Ms. Healy explained that the coordinator and co-chairs are handling this process because it cannot logistically be a full Commission process, due to open meeting laws. Other commissions may have sub-committees that deal with nominations, interviews, etc. The

administrative aspect of interviewing and selecting nominees is something the co-chairs and coordinator have taken on in the absence of a sub-committee dedicated to this task.

Commissioner Timoria Saba stated that this is not the process that was used for her own appointment to the Commission, and maybe others. Commissioner Saba was concerned that the recruitment ask came from the co-chairs and the commissioners were asked to go out into their individual networks and put time and thought into who would be people that could really make a difference and have a voice. In the recruitment process, there is a boundary as to who is considered qualified and who is not. It is concerning as to the level in which I would be involved in recruiting. People with lived experience may be searching for their first level of involvement, where they haven't previously had a chance to be heard. Resources and voices are needed in the western part of the state.

Ms. Healy commented that the Commission's enabling statute is structural and that the House and Senate chair seats were added by amendment and are discretionary, meaning they can be filled with anywhere from zero to three people.

Commissioner Nneka Hall stated she was concerned by the way that a recent applicant had been turned down. The Commission is rooted in mental health and there has to be a way to refuse people without being harmful to their mental health status or making them doubt their worth. Many commissioners would not be here without their life experiences. Commissioner Hall commented that we should be mindful of the fact that we are a Commission that is rooted in mental health.

Commissioner Leena Mittal stated that personal and professional experience are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Some with lived experience may have only that, and each commissioner has different motivations and drives. Subjectivity in the commissioner selection process leaves a risk of bias. The more collaborative decisions are, the more likely they will be fair and equitable. The process as it is now seems to have a part that happens explicitly and a part that happens behind the curtain.

Ms. Healy commented that the selection process is inherently biased because there is no set of objective criteria or a scoring system that can be used. There can be more involvement in selection and the process can be more open but there are limitations on that as well, for example there cannot be a full Commission interview for any candidate. It would not work for logistic reasons and for privacy reasons for applicants vis a vis open meeting law.

Commissioner Mittal stated that if whoever is involved in the process has a clear sense of the group's intention, then that is reasonable. The process currently does not feel that way. We all have different senses and visions of what and who the Commission needs, and that doesn't bring us to a sense of being a team or being a collaborative, unified group. There does not have to be a test in order for there to be equity. There can still be diverse input and multiplicity in effort.

Commissioner Representative Mindy Domb stated that she would want to support the effort to create a consistent and universal approach to reviewing applications, and put it in writing. Commissioner Rep. Domb agreed with a committee reviewing applications based on an established, agreed-upon list of experiences or qualities that we think would be beneficial.

That could be agreed upon by the whole group but then put into practice by the sub-committee. The Commission has to figure out a way to be supportive of both lived experience and professional experience. Having a rubric of experiences and qualities that we think are important, would empower nominating committee to approach reviewing applicants in a consistent way that makes people feel more comfortable.

Commissioner Margarita O'Neill-Arana stated her support for the idea of having a clear process to determine what the needs are at any given time, and to develop a criteria around that. Issue of experience is an important criteria and is just as valid as an academic credential. A combination of both will make for a stronger Commission and decision-making process.

Commissioner Hall asked whether seats were still open, and stated that she would not feel safe recommending someone for the seats with lived experience currently, but would feel comfortable recommending someone who is working in the field because there would be less chance for damage to be done.

Commissioner Joshua Sparrow stated that the Commission cannot accomplish its purposes without specifying the full range of diversity and having the wisdom and knowledge of people with a wide set of experiences. In developing criteria, these hopefully would include racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, sexual orientation, gender, educational, employment, and rural diversity so the Commission can really look at where the needs are and how to come together. Additionally, it is important to consider what happens once a decision is made. It is good to have criteria and come close to a selection process, but also important to onboard new commissioners so they feel safe and fully respected, even if they are the only ones like them in the setting. Similarly, if candidates are not being brought on board there should be a clear set of processes so that commissioners feel comfortable recommending others. A relational approach should be applied in the entire process.

Commissioner Karin Downs stated that there are ways within the process of recruiting and interviewing to have a trauma-informed lens. The Department of Public Health has a process where the interview questions are thought through very closely and shared with the candidate a half hour before hand. Candidates also are given a list of everyone who will be in the interview in case there is someone present that may act as a trigger. At the end of the interview there is time for the person to add additional things to their responses.

Commissioner Saba commented that we don't know how decisions affect people once we get those people involved. The individual that recently applied to be on the Commission said they felt like they were finally going to get the chance to be something again. It reminded Commissioner Saba of the beginning of her journey 12 years ago, in trying to find some sort of connection to just one person who understood what she had been through. It is important to consider what is going to qualify someone to be able to participate, and it goes deeper because we are dealing with people who are experiencing very difficult things. From the advocacy side, individuals with these difficult experiences would be who are being nominated. The language we use when appointing or not appointing someone is extremely important.

Commissioner O'Neill-Arana asked what the next steps are for this. Ms. Healy responded that the Commission seems aligned on having written criteria setting out the qualities and experiences we're looking for and making sure we combine the attributes and different things the Commission needs. The needs are something that the Commission should be deciding together on what it needs.

Commissioner Sparrow stated that in written criteria, roles can be static, but people grow and change. May be important to have people who have lived experience at different places in their journey. The criteria could include something dynamic to be more inclusive of where people are in their journey or recovery.

Commissioner Saba responded that, in terms of the process, we would need to understand why someone would be denied. The Commission could be an opportunity to find a diamond in the rough, who has the passion and wants to make a difference and make connections. It may not be fair to put them up against someone who has started a nonprofit. Instead, we could be expanding opportunities for someone who had none.

### III. Adjournment