

Virginia Addiction and Recovery Council (VARC)

May 2026 Meeting Minutes

Submitted for approval on July 10, 2026

Chair: Dr. Peter Breslin, M.D.

Secretary: Delegate Adele McClure (HD-2)

Attendees:

In-person

Mike Sizemore, *SAARA of Virginia*
Anika Richburg, *SAARA of Virginia*
Dr. Cameron Webb, *Virginia Department of Health*
Brian Smith, *Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth*
Jen McArthur, *Department of Criminal Justice Services*
Stephen Wade, *Department of Social Services*
Katie Crumble, *Virginia ABC*
Bobby Limper, *Department of Criminal Justice Services*
Dr. Carolyn Hawly, *Virginia Partnership for Gaming and Health*
Jessica Lee, *Department of Corrections*
Allen Stewert, *Department of Corrections*
Delegate Debra Gardner, *House of Delegates*
Michelle Satterlund
Marie Bage, *DBHDS*
Candace Roney, *DBHDS*
Kristin Hunter, *DCJS*
Samantha Hollins, *VDOE*
Tiffany George, *DMAS*
Brennan Smith, *VFHY*

Virtual

Rebecca Holmes, *Highlands CSB*
Delegate Adele McClure, *House of Delegates*
Delegate Kirk McPike, *House of Delegates*
April Miller, *Allegheny Highlands CSB*
Kelly Bulen, *Eastern Shore CSB*
Chuck Wilcox, *Virginia Association of Addiction Professionals*

Meeting Minutes:

a. Welcome and Introductions

Chairman Breslin called the meeting to order, noting this was the Council's first meeting of the year and the first following the 2026 legislative session. Members and participants introduced themselves in-person and virtually. Staff confirmed a quorum was present.

b. Review of Minutes from December 11, 2025 Meeting

Staff confirmed circulating December 11 meeting minutes in advance for review. Motion made and seconded to approve meeting minutes without objection or correction.

c. *Old Business*

Chairman Breslin reported ongoing work to clean up the Council roster, removing inactive, departed, or deceased members and processing new appointments. Several statutory positions remain unfilled, including the statewide consumer and advocacy organization position. Chairman Breslin introduced the idea of SAARA of Virginia for the position; however no vote was taken and will be considered at a later date.

Chairman Breslin also conveyed that the Council has not fulfilled its statutory obligations, including an annual letter to the General Assembly supporting or opposing relevant bills and delivering an annual report.

Further, Chairman Breslin emphasized the need for the Council to be more active in its work noting that there are four delegates and two senators as members, so the Council is positioned to advance legislative fixes wherever possible.

d. *Agency and Organizational Updates*

Virginia Department of Corrections – Presenter: Alan Stewart, Statewide SUD Manager

VADOC highlighted recent efforts to strengthen substance use disorder treatment and recovery services for incarcerated and reentering individuals. Updates included implementation of new legislation supporting peer recovery specialists and statewide overdose prevention, expansion of SUD social workers, peer recovery programs, harm reduction initiatives, and Medicaid enrollment prior to release. VADOC also replaced punitive sanctions for positive drug tests with individualized treatment referrals, reflecting an evidence-based approach to recovery. The agency reported significant progress in reducing overdose deaths within correctional facilities and emphasized that continued collaboration among state agencies has strengthened continuity of care and improved reentry outcomes.

Members commended the interagency collaboration and continuity-of-care focus. VADOC noted expanded residential SUD program capacity with available beds, and reminded partners that facility entry restrictions (e.g., paper) respond to drug-soaked contraband. A CSB partner highlighted the Alive RVA warmline partnership with VADOC peer recovery specialists.

Barrier Crimes Discussion

Chuck Wilcox (Virginia Association of Addiction Professionals) raised Virginia's barrier crimes framework. The Council discussed Virginia's barrier crimes framework and its impact on the behavioral health workforce. Members noted that lifetime employment restrictions and lengthy background check processes prevent otherwise qualified individuals—including certified peer recovery specialists—from working in DBHDS-licensed facilities and contribute to workforce shortages. The Chair identified barrier crimes reform as a key legislative priority for the

upcoming session, with VADOC highlighting formerly incarcerated certified PRSs as an important workforce opportunity.

Virginia Partnership for Gaming and Health at VCU – Presenter: Dr. Carolyn Hawley, Executive Director

Virginia Partnership for Gaming and Health presented on the Commonwealth's growing need for problem gambling treatment and recovery services. The statewide program provides peer recovery support, provider training, and financial assistance for treatment, serving more than 1,200 Virginians in 2025 while experiencing continued growth in demand. Members discussed emerging trends, including sports betting, illegal online gambling, and prediction markets, as well as the need for routine gambling screening across agencies. The Partnership also highlighted ongoing workforce and outreach efforts and urged the Council to support creation of a Gaming Regulatory Commission and expanded access to the Problem Gambling Treatment and Support Fund to meet increasing service needs.

e. Legislative Updates

Legislators in attendance were given the opportunity to share legislative updates from the 2026 session.

Delegate Adele McClure

- Co-patroned HB360, which would regulate the sales of and access to kratom products. This was among the first kratom bills in the General Assembly; it passed.
- Budget not yet finalized, but included \$1 million for CLCs, \$2 million for substance use disorder treatment, and \$5 million for behavioral health and SUD workforce development
- Emphasized comprehensive support for people with co-occurring disorders and noted the casino and skill games bills did pass the General Assembly but were vetoed by the Governor

Delegate Debra Gardner

- Newly appointed to the Council; chairs the Behavioral Health subcommittee of House Health and Human Services, with prior career experience as a certified substance abuse counselor and chief deputy at VADOC and DCJS.
- Passed HB283, which allows pregnant women to continue opioid use disorder treatment without being reported for child abuse, passed both chambers and signed by Governor
- Invited agencies and advocates to flag unintended consequences of legislation so that they can be addressed

Delegate Kirk McPike

- Newest legislative member to join the council. Elected after the bill-filing deadline so carried no legislation this session, but supported colleagues' bills. Noted gambling

impacts as a significant local concern in his Alexandria district and looks forward to contributing to the Council's work this year

Senator Jennifer Boysko (*unable to attend, conveyed through Chairman Breslin*)

- As Chair of the Senate Finance and Appropriations Public Safety Subcommittee, offered to pursue avenues to support VADOC; VADOC emphasized the need for sustainable state funding to continue grant-piloted initiatives
- Interested in taking on kratom as a legislative priority

f. *New Business*

2026 Legislative Overview: Recovery Residences in Virginia – Presenter: Dr. Candace Roney, DBHDS Office of Addiction Recovery and Wellness Supports

DBHDS presented an overview of Virginia's recovery residence framework and implementation of 2026 legislation (SB 270/HB 931), which strengthens oversight, resident protections, and transparency. The new law prohibits recovery residences from requiring participation in specific treatment programs or providers as a condition of residency, expands DBHDS oversight and certification requirements, and limits referrals to certified residences. Members also discussed implementation timelines, outreach to existing operators, and future reporting requirements aimed at improving accountability and protecting residents while expanding access to quality recovery housing.

Retail Cannabis Best Practices Comparison – Presenter: Colleen Hughes, Deputy Director, DBHDS Office of Addiction Recovery and Wellness Supports

DBHDS presented best practices for a public health-focused retail cannabis framework, drawing on experiences from other states. The presentation outlined recommendations for licensing, product standards, retail operations, enforcement, and reinvesting cannabis tax revenue into prevention, treatment, recovery, and community programs. Staff also compared these best practices with Virginia's vetoed 2026 retail cannabis legislation, highlighting areas of alignment and key policy differences to inform future legislative discussions.

Upcoming Council Priorities

- Kratom / 7-OH: the Chair proposes inviting a speaker for the next meeting; the Council should develop a position. Members noted the recent kratom regulation bill (HB 360) and Senator Boysko's interest
- Barrier crimes reform confirmed as a leading Council legislative priority
- Members were asked to email additional legislative priorities to the Chair or staff; items must remain within the Council's addiction-and-recovery scope.

g. *Public Comment*

The floor was opened for public comment in the room and online. No public comment offered.

h. *Adjournment*

Motion made and seconded to adjourn, the meeting adjourned.