



CITY OF DOVER DELAWARE

MAYOR'S **BLUE-RIBBON** OPIOID USE DISORDER TASFORCE

MEETING MINUTES

February 12, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.

MAYOR'S OPIOID USE DISORDER TASFORCE MEETING

The Mayor's **Blue Ribbon** Opioid Use Disorder Taskforce Committee was held on **February 12, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.** with Chairman Dr. Roy Sudler, Jr. presiding. OUD Taskforce members present were Mr. Benard Pratt Mr. Joseph H. Bedford III, Mrs. Chelle Paul, and Mrs. Toni Jordan Honorable Eric L. Buckson, Mr. James Oxford Sr., was absent.

COUNCIL MEMBERS' PRESENT

District 2 Councilman Brian Lewis.

No additions or deletions were proposed for the meeting.

INVOCATION

The invocation was given by Mrs. Chelle Paul,

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chairman Sudler.

AGENDA ITEMS

1. Discussion regarding Recommendation number **6 titled Youth-Focused Campaigns** forwarded to the Mayor for Approval; subsequently, confirmed by the Prescription Opioid Settlement (**POSDC**) for implementation.
Research Topic- TikTok, Theatre, and Youth Art as Related to Breaking the Silence of Opioid Use Disorder's Impact on the Capital of Delaware. The Ten Strategic Points represent the foundational elements of the study.
2. **Chair's Recommendation:** To approve recommendation number **6 [Youth-Focused Research/Campaign]** for Approval by the Mayor and forwarded to the Prescription Opioid Settlement Commission (**POSDC**) for being awarded General Grants: Over \$30,000



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AGENDA ADDITIONS/DELETIONS

Chairman Sudler reviewed the agenda items and asked for a motion to adopt the agenda. Mrs. Paul moved to adopt the meeting agenda for **February 12, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.** The motion was properly seconded by Mr. Pratt. There was no discussion on the agenda item; hence, the motion was unanimously adopted.

CHAIRMAN SUDLER'S ANALYSIS:

The Dover Mayor's Blue-Ribbon Opioid Use Disorder Taskforce recommendations directly aligned with the Exhibit E list of permitted opioid remediation uses by focusing on youth-focused prevention, comprehensive treatment access, and community-based support services. Specifically, proposed actions such as creative youth media campaigns, expansion of detox facilities, and hiring behavioral health professionals' maps to approved strategies under Section G (Prevention) and Section E (Treatment) of the settlement guidelines.

This breakdown establishes explicit metric tracking to ensure statutory alignment with the allowable remediation categories outlined by the [Delaware Opioid Settlement Commission](#).

1. Prevention: Youth Campaigns & School Support

- **Taskforce Finding:** ~75% of students successfully use existing care. Early drug exposure begins in Pre-K/Kindergarten, accelerated by peer pressure.

Exhibit E Approved Strategy: *Section B.2 / Section G:* Education for school-based and youth-focused programs that discourage misuse; youth-focused creative media and preventative campaigns.



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Taskforce Metric	Proposed Deliverable Tracker	Exhibit E Compliance KPI
Youth Reached via Art	Number of youths participating in "Write for Me" & "Expression in the Rain" theater/rap pilots.	Percentage increase in early-intervention program enrollment among high-risk cohorts.
Digital Preventative Engagement	Analytics of local youth-led TikTok and creative social media anti-misuse campaigns.	Total impressions, completed views, and click-through rates to local helpline resources.
School Care Expansion	Baseline of 75% student care utilization expanded to include early screening tools.	Implementation rate of early-childhood risk screenings in Pre-K and Elementary levels.

2. Treatment: Expansion of Medical Facilities & Services

- **Taskforce Finding:** Severe deficiency in local detox options, inpatient treatment beds, and medication integration.
- **Exhibit E Approved Strategy:** *Section B.4 / Section E:* Provide and expand treatment and recovery support services including residential, inpatient, medical detox, and outpatient counseling.

Taskforce Metric	Proposed Deliverable Tracker	Exhibit E Compliance KPI
Detox/Treatment Bed Capacity	Local municipal beds funded or subsidized to handle acute, complex adolescent withdrawal.	Net reduction in average wait times for regional medical detox placement.
Clinical Staffing Levels	Number of behavioral health workers, counselors, and specialists successfully recruited.	Patient-to-clinician ratio improvements at regional centers like Concerted Care Group Dover .



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3. Recovery Support & Mobile Wraparound Services

- **Taskforce Finding:** Dover youth face substantial trauma from broken homes; there is an urgent need for mobile intervention units.

Exhibit E Approved Strategy: *Section C.3 / Section F:* Comprehensive wraparound and recovery support services including mobile response teams, housing assistance, and trauma-informed care.

Taskforce Metric	Proposed Deliverable Tracker	Exhibit E Compliance KPI
Mobile Crisis Deployment	Field deployment frequency of new behavioral health mobile intervention units.	Average response time to youth-overdose alerts or acute localized family crises.
Holistic Case Management	Number of youths connected to continuous mentorship, housing security, and trauma therapy.	6-month and 12-month treatment retention and recovery stability rates.
Marginalized Outreach	Service distribution metrics targeting homeless populations and Kent County communities of color.	Demographic equity analysis matching service utilization to local overdose epidemiology.

These structures align local Dover data with state auditing categories.

1. Institutional Care Baseline Metric

The taskforce data indicates that **75% of the student cohort** is currently served successfully by institutional care. Remediation efforts target the remaining 25% gap, addressing severe trauma and substance exposure manifesting early in the student timeline (Pre-K to Kindergarten).

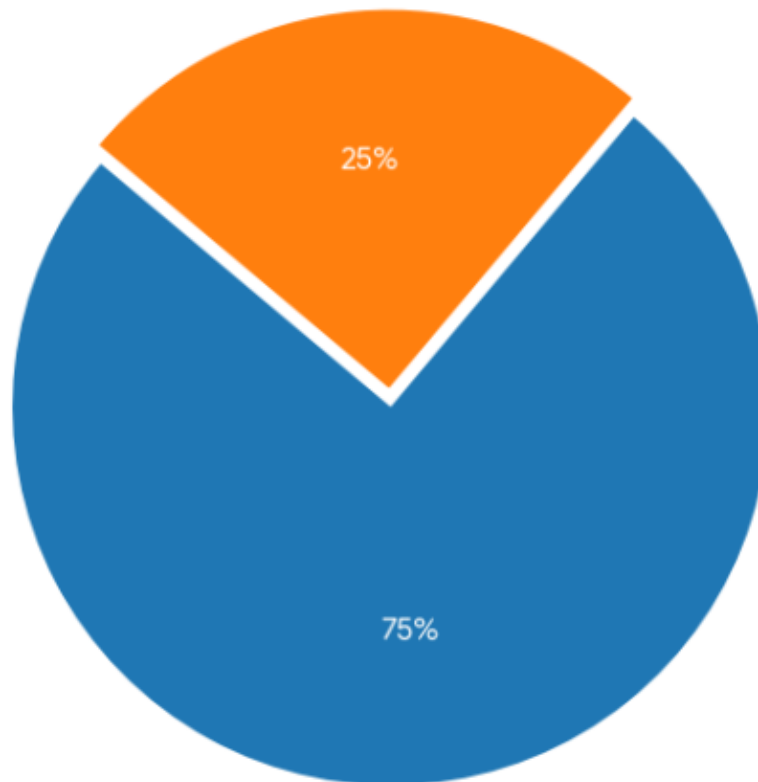


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Dover Student Population Counseling Baseline

Unserviced Expansion Target



Utilizing Care (Mental, Academic, Life Skills)

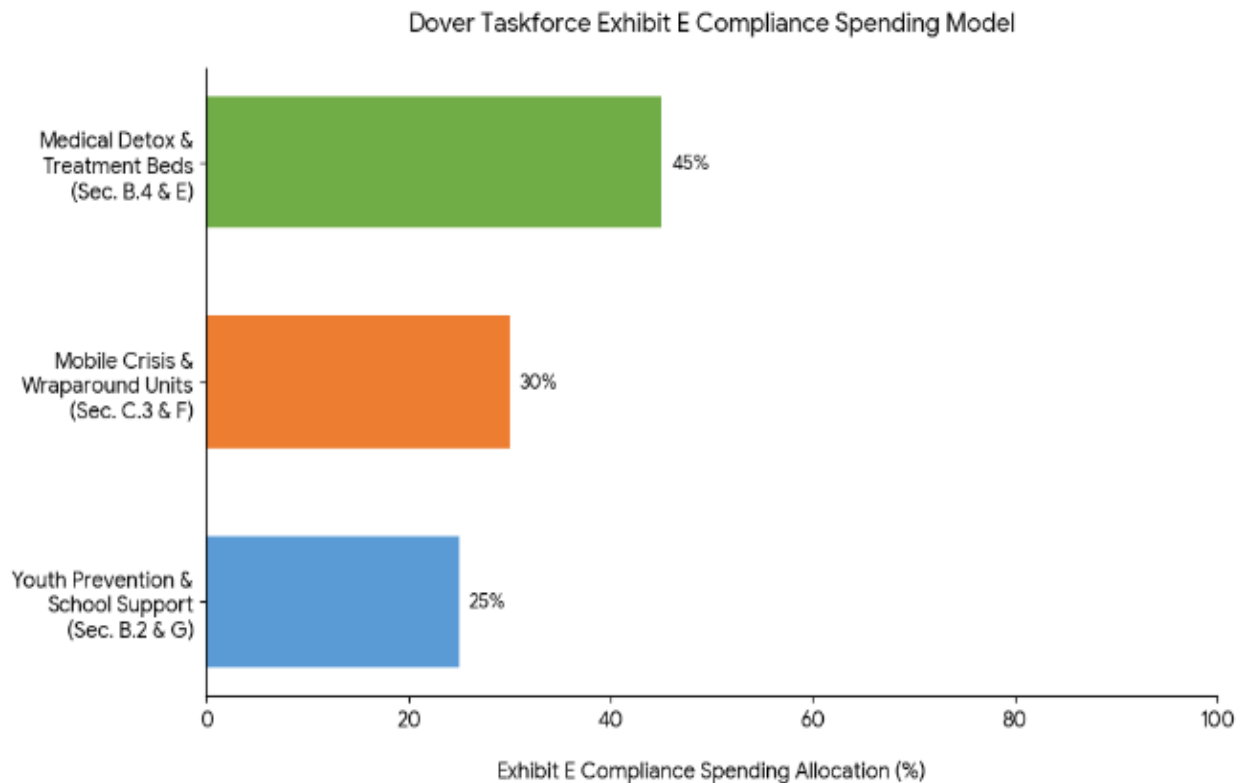


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2. Exhibit E Compliance Allocation Model

To secure funding from the state's Prescription Opioid Settlement, municipal allocations must map onto the formal remediation tracks outlined in the national guidelines. The graph below presents a tactical funding blueprint derived from the Taskforce's six key recommendations:





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3. Data Matrix & KPI Performance Tracking Table

Use this core matrix within your state applications to prove operational viability and precise performance oversight.

Strategic Focus Track	Local Project Examples	Direct Performance Metrics (KPIs)	Exhibit E Statutory Flag
Track 1: Youth Prevention & School Support	"Write for Me" pilot" Expression in the Rain" program TikTok anti-misuse media	Total count of youth enrolled in creative art therapy Gross social media impressions within local zip codes% of early-intervention screenings deployed in Pre-K/K	Sections B.2 & G <i>(Primary & Secondary Youth Prevention)</i>
Track 2: Medical Detox & Facility Infrastructure	Clinical capacity scaling Adolescent care beds regional provider networks	Net change in active municipal detox/treatment beds Average client placement wait times (target reduction) Total unique patients admitted for OUD clinical care	Sections B.4 & E <i>(Expanding Inpatient & Outpatient Treatment)</i>
Track 3: Mobile Crisis & Wraparound Units	Mobile intervention teams Trauma case management Homeless/minority outreach	Total monthly field deployments of response vehicles Average emergency response runtime to youth Crises Demographic equity ratio (unhoused/minority care access)	Sections C.3 & F <i>(Recovery Support Services & Crisis Teams)</i>



Dr. Travis Mishoe Sudler I. is the Chairman of the Dover Human Relations Commission and Delaware State University's Liaison to the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA), which is a non-judicial state agency charged with safeguarding the welfare of Delaware's children.



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Dr. Travis Mishoe Sudler I. facilitated a comprehensive discussion regarding the Office of the Child Advocate's (OCA) strategic management of funds allocated for addressing Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) with the aim of safeguarding children adversely affected by this issue. As Delaware State University's Liaison to the OCA, Dr. Sudler operates within a non-judicial state agency dedicated to the protection and advocacy of the welfare of children throughout Delaware. During the discussion, Dr. Sudler reported that 75% of the student population is demonstrating favorable outcomes, with 100% of these individuals availing themselves of the institution's multifaceted counseling services. These encompass not only mental health support and academic guidance but also essential life skills training, ensuring a holistic approach to student well-being and development.

Chairman Dr. Roy Sudler, Jr. asked if there were any committee member that would like to ask a question? Are there any questions that you seem to be able to ask in regard to how, in the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) domain, we can help service OUD or advocate for some additional services? Committee Member Joseph Bedford III responded Yeah, just seeing, you know, what Dr. Travis Sudler was talking about, as far as, you know, kids aging out of foster care. I mean, I see it younger, so if I look at it from a different angle, other than, you know, 18-year-olds, I'm looking at, you know, kids that are in pre-K and kids are already on medication. So, they're dealing with family members that may be an active addiction, brothers or sisters. So, I mean, overall, it's bigger than just aging out of foster care.

As far as children, it starts in pre-K and kindergarten, to be honest with you, because we have younger generations that are seeing opioid abuse. They're seeing any type of, you know, drug abuse from the use at an early age, it's affecting these kids at an early age. So, as far as the aging out, I get it, you know, transitional and all that, the campaign, I'm looking forward to that, because we have to start now, as soon as possible, because we've got kids, you know, pretty much scared the kids out of it. I mean, we need a lot more support in classroom, what the heck goes with DOE. But, as far as what we're trying to do here, and what Dr. Sudler offered, yes, but we have to, it's bigger than just the aging out. To be honest with you, it starts bigger than that. I mean, like the gentleman, like Cameron and KP, they were talking about it, you know, you have drug factors, you mean gang factors.

So, it's not just the opioid, I mean, there's a whole bunch that's into it, especially when you're in the classroom seeing it. You know, I mean, from middle school to, you know, pre-K, kindergarten, what I've been seeing over the last three years. Yeah, this is when we work, but we



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have got a lot of stuff to do here. I mean, it's bigger than that. You know, we need people, you know, filling up these rooms and people in the classrooms. You may not understand just people out there doing things on the political level or the administrative level, but it's much more than that. I mean, I really don't see improvement. It's going to take time, and, but it's just going to be, it's bigger than, it's bigger than just that transition. Chairman Sudler Thanked Committee Member Bedford for his comments and then stated to Committee Member Bernard Pratt, I know you have spoken at the last meeting in regard to also being an advocate for being proactive, starting with the youth campaign based on the information that we've received from our, Mr. Devane our detox specialist that was here from the last meeting.

Did you want to elaborate on that, having some more time to think about that since the last meeting? Did you say anything you'd like to contribute to that or add to that since then?

Committee Member Bernard Pratt stated, I yield to him at the present time on just being a sponge and really absorbing a lot of things that Dr. Travis Mishoe Sudler I, focused on upon. However, he did make a few comments based on a couple of comments on the topic. He elaborated on the point that he was really caught off guard, like learning some new things that he just is speaking upon. And his main thing is, I don't know if it really matters because you want to help the young, period. But gender wise, my question would be, do you see it more in your men or more in your young women as these things come from?

So, with the, with the sample size that I'm talking about, we have more females than males. We have more females than males. Because, and the reason why I ask that is because, what's the reasons for putting them there? So, helping them wise, you're helping them with, you know, the usage and things like that. But then it comes to the fact of more of a different kind of counseling may be needed as well. So that's why I'm absorbing it to your day. Because it's more, it's going to be added to this. It just comes to the part of suffering and addiction. It's more to it and to it. So that's what I'm trying to understand. Dr. Travis Mishoe Sudler engaged with the insights shared during our last meeting, where Mr. Devane raised important points about the detox facility and Mr. Paul highlighted the treatment facility.

It is essential to recognize that, while comprehensive services may be challenging to provide, simultaneous support for both detox and treatment is crucial. Currently, our resources don't extend much beyond basic material, but we do have systems in place to support individuals in recovery and prevent relapses. The treatment facility mentioned has the potential to offer sufficient services to address the needs of our community across all demographics. This includes the critical aspects discussed, particularly regarding child advocacy and the foster care system, where proactive measures are especially needed. Chairman Sudler expressed gratitude to



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Committee Member Bernard Pratt for his question and acknowledged Dr. Travis Mishoe Sudler's contributions. He also recognized a community member, Mr. Cam Norwood. "My name is Cam Norwood," he began. "I previously served as the interim director of NextGen 302 and am currently the founder and executive director of Power Roots Foundation.

Our focus is on violence intervention and prevention within neighborhoods that are often affected by trauma and loss. Having grown up in these communities, I have a deep understanding of the challenges faced by the children and families here. When I decided to pursue a positive path, I became an advocate for these kids, who recognized me from my past. This established a sense of trust, and I've been able to connect with them meaningfully. Many are dealing with issues arising from opiate use disorder within their families, leading to hardships such as food insecurity and the struggles that come with substance abuse. Chairman Sudler then asked how young people express what they're experiencing, aside from verbal communication. He inquired whether they felt comfortable discussing their feelings with counselors or relatives, and whether creative outlets, such as art or social media platforms like TikTok, might be effective ways for them to express themselves.

He suggested that perhaps facilitating their stories through TikTok or even a live theater performance could provide a positive outlet for healing and connection. Mr. Norwood responded thoughtfully, noting that the OUD Taskforce would need to identify which young individuals might benefit from these creative approaches, as not all youth openly share their struggles immediately. Many feel compelled to speak once they establish a safe space and a trusting relationship with those in care. He acknowledged that while platforms like TikTok are already in use, facilitating structured creative projects could encourage youth to express themselves. This would provide them with both a sense of purpose and a platform for sharing their experiences, bolstered by a supportive environment. Chairman Sudler expressed a strong interest in hearing from the community about the advantages and disadvantages of this research opportunity.

He emphasized the importance of providing a platform for youth to express themselves and pursue healing, particularly through art, with the support of larger institutions like museums. Committee Member Chelle Paul contributed to the discussion by highlighting the need for a deeper understanding of marginalized youth. She mentioned the challenges faced by young individuals, including those involved in gang activities or born into addiction. Paul underscored the significance of enabling these youth to express themselves through various forms of art, including tagging and graffiti, which are valid artistic expressions. She noted the importance of guiding youth to channel their creativity constructively, while recognizing that many aspire to



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careers in music, particularly rap. Paul acknowledged that while some youth struggle academically, they often find their voice and express their emotions artistically.

Mr. Norwood added to the dialogue by recognizing the importance of ensuring participants can interact positively within the group. He mentioned platforms like TikTok, which offer unique opportunities for young people to express their experiences, potentially through rap, as a means of coping with their struggles. Chairman Sudler reiterated the vital role of creative expression in addressing issues such as opioid addiction and its impact on families and individuals. He encouraged further conversation about the proposed TikTok theater and youth art initiative as a way to break the silence surrounding these significant topics. Community member George Johnson shared his experience of supporting a local teacher who created a studio for children, where they engaged in dance and TikTok videos. He noted the importance of providing positive outlets for youth, although he acknowledged the challenges faced in maintaining the program due to financial constraints and the studio's location. Johnson emphasized the power of TikTok in shaping young minds, cautioning that it can present both positive and misleading information.

He advocated for structured guidance to help children navigate these influences as they develop. We need to take decisive action if we choose not to pursue this approach. It's essential that we carefully consider how to structure our initiatives to ensure they yield positive outcomes. Many young people are eager for this type of engagement; I've spoken with countless kids who express a genuine passion for it. Addressing the broader community challenges—such as the opioid crisis—is crucial. We can create a positive framework that prevents negative influences from affecting our youth. By focusing on this objective, we can pave the way for success. Children shouldn't have to navigate positive and negative currents on their own. They need support and a pathway that allows them to thrive. Many kids face identity and abandonment issues, often stemming from broken homes.

Platforms like TikTok give them a sense of belonging by providing validation through views and comments, a lifeline for those feeling isolated. Approaching these kids can be challenging; they may not open up to just anyone, but I have a unique perspective that resonates with them because they understand my background and experiences. Building trust is critical. If we can extend a helping hand and convey the message that we are in this together, we can break down barriers. In my work with the "My Brother's Keeper" program, we had a significant impact. Being able to connect with and share experiences opens doors for many individuals. They often tap into their raw emotions, what we call "Jelly Belly" allowing for authentic interactions that can channel their pain into something positive. We must determine whether we are addressing issues from a negative or positive perspective and focus on the core problems.



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I genuinely appreciate the support from my colleagues. Establishing a dedicated space for these discussions—like a community center—would lead to substantial success. We should invite young people to explore their creative outlets, whether it's dance, poetry, or other artistic expressions. Collaboration is key; when we invest in each other, we all benefit. Regarding community engagement in this TikTok initiative for youth outreach, I am fully on board. I understand the importance of this initiative. Recently, I presented to the state legislative body about critical issues such as technical violations. For instance, I completed three years of probation without incident, yet a single missed curfew risked sending me back to jail. This type of punitive response stifles individuals genuinely trying to rebuild their lives. Change is challenging, and asking someone to shift their established routine to pursue a new path can be incredibly difficult. When a minor misstep jeopardizes a hard-earned second chance, people disengage entirely.

We must strive to create an environment that supports growth and recovery, rather than perpetuating cycles of failure. The current disconnection between youth and their support systems is evident. Many young individuals lack effective communication skills needed to articulate their struggles and needs. Although some probation officers (POs) show understanding and empathy towards these youths, others do not, exacerbating their feelings of isolation. These individuals are navigating the complexities of reintegration into society after facing punitive measures, such as Level Five confinement, which serves as a form of punishment rather than rehabilitation. Upon re-entering society, these individuals must recognize that probation officers primarily serve as supervisors to ensure compliance with the law—not just penalties for technical violations. It is essential to create an environment that allows for error and growth. Probation officers should collaborate with these young individuals to develop tailored portfolios that identify specific issues, such as curfew violations or difficulties with reporting.

This could take the form of an Advancement of Achievement Program that documents progress and certifies improvements. Providing tangible recognition of achievements could foster a sense of hope and agency, motivating youths to engage more positively with their circumstances. When asked about the persistent participation in illegal gang activities among youth in the capital of Delaware, Mr. Johnson noted that many youths are in search of guidance and a sense of belonging. In contrast to past times when violence was less prevalent and typically limited to fistfights, many of today's youths lack supportive familial structures. Absent communication from parents and a strong father figure leaves these youth vulnerable to negative influences, prompting them to seek acceptance and camaraderie from peers who may lead them into criminal



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activities. In response to questions regarding the link between opioid abuse, trauma, and chronic pain, Mr. Johnson affirmed that peer pressure plays a significant role.

Young individuals often succumb to substance use when they are surrounded by peers who engage in such behaviors, especially during formative developmental stages. It is crucial to understand that acceptance and normalization of drug use among their peers can trigger a downward spiral into addiction. Addressing these issues requires diligent effort. The community must remain steadfast in its commitment—giving in to fatigue or frustration is not an option. A dedicated team, equipped with resources, can facilitate meaningful change. Mr. Johnson emphasized the importance of engaging authentically with youth by establishing trust through one-on-one interactions. His approach, characterized by candor and relatability, helps foster discussions about the realities of their lives. The discussion emphasized the importance of understanding the varying experiences and backgrounds individuals have when addressing issues related to youth and substance use. Those who work with children often have personal stories that shape their perspectives, making their insights valuable.

The concept of giving back to the community was highlighted, as many individuals in these roles have themselves faced challenges and recognize the need to support the younger generation. A critical point made was the significance of experiential learning. Youth are more likely to resonate with individuals who have faced similar struggles, as they find authenticity in shared experiences. Specifically, when discussing substances like opioids, it's essential to clarify that the conversation extends beyond traditional views. Substances often labeled as "party drugs," like Biggs, alter emotions and serve as a temporary escape from reality. They can enhance feelings of enjoyment or numb distress, making them appeal to young people. Mr. Johnson explained that substances like Biggs can act as an emotional regulator, stimulating feelings of happiness during social activities or intensifying negative emotions when someone is already upset. This dual nature can lead to a cycle of dependency, especially among youth who may be grappling with issues such as depression or loneliness.

When individuals are introduced to these substances, they may be tempted to engage in use as a means of coping, unaware of the potential long-term consequences. Moreover, the conversation touched on the similarities between opioid use and other forms of escapism, such as alcohol or even certain sexual behaviors, where the primary motivation is to escape pain and achieve a sense of superiority or relief from distress. This pattern of behavior can lead to codependency, making it difficult for individuals to seek healthier alternatives when they become reliant on these substances for comfort. Understanding these dynamics is vital in addressing the broader issue of substance use among youth and creating effective intervention strategies. We absolutely



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must advocate for change in our community. We mustn't just sit back but rather take proactive steps to create positive opportunities for our youth. As I discussed with Sister Vonda, having more presence and involvement in our neighborhood is vital—this is how we can truly make a difference.

We should engage directly, just as I would if I were navigating a jungle of challenges, returning with a clean slate and a wealth of potential. When I spoke with some young men recently, I asked them what they would want to see in our city that could genuinely benefit them. Their answers were telling. One young man expressed the need for a space dedicated to the arts—an opportunity to understand and appreciate our community's history. Another shared that they'd like a dedicated facility for basketball and other activities, something more engaging than a simple skating rink. They want fun, meaningful alternatives to the streets where they currently feel trapped. The reality is, when we provide these kinds of opportunities, we offer them choices. Choices that can steer them away from negative influences and help them forge a path towards a brighter future. We must be the ones to offer that direction. Community member Bonnie Pennington's words resonated deeply.

She shared her story of overcoming adversity, emphasizing that sometimes, it takes a stranger to connect and inspire kids. She knows firsthand the challenges kids face—having been in similar shoes herself. Bonnie is eager to step in, to reach out, and to lift those who are struggling. Her experience demonstrates that we can't underestimate the role of mentorship and support from those who have walked a difficult path and found their way back. We must embrace individuals like Bonnie, who are willing to share their stories and provide hope. We must create environments where these conversations can happen, where young people can engage openly with someone who understands their struggles. Let's not forget that every child deserves a chance. We have the power to facilitate change, to engage our community in meaningful ways, and to inspire our youth to rise above their circumstances. Together, we can ignite transformation—let's set aside our fears and commit to doing the work. We need to act now, because every moment counts, and our youth deserve better.

Chairman Sudler expressed gratitude to Mrs. Pennington for her eagerness to engage with the youth. Committee Member Chelle Paul then addressed Mrs. Pennington, clarifying that she believes there may have been a misunderstanding of Mr. Johnson's intentions. Paul emphasized that addressing community and social issues indeed requires collective effort. She firmly stated, "We work with everyone, regardless of color, race, or sexuality. Our mission is to engage with all members of the community, as you never know who might effectively connect with someone in need." Mrs. Pennington responded passionately, asserting her commitment to making a



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difference. She pointed out that she could easily have remained silent and uninvolved but chose to step up instead. She described witnessing troubling behaviors among youth in the community and how those experiences resonate with her past, including her own encounters with the law. She made it clear that it took a stranger to help her recognize the danger she was heading toward.

Chairman Sudler then introduced community member Eliza Parker, founder of the Care of Their Life Project. Parker highlighted her dedication to providing essential resources for violence intervention, prevention, and substance abuse within the community. She mentioned her close collaboration with Mr. Bedford, stressing that addressing these issues requires operating from a place of understanding and cultural competency. Parker underscored her connection with youth, noting that she is only a few years removed from high school and uses her successful podcast to raise awareness of these critical topics. Parker posed a direct question to Dr. Travis Mishoe Sudler regarding the focus of his program. Dr. Sudler clarified that his work with the Office of Child Advocacy specifically targets issues related to foster care, noting that while foster care is a vital need, it's just one aspect of a larger problem. He acknowledged the current stagnation in violence levels but made it clear that proactive measures are necessary given the approaching warmer months.

He recounted a successful youth program in Sussex County, revealing that even youth engaged in criminal behavior expressed simple desires—like visiting a trampoline park. Dr. Sudler stressed the importance of recognizing the underlying issues that lead to addiction and violence in the community, pointing out a failure to provide adequate rehabilitation for both people with an addiction and those involved in drug dealings. He asserted that addiction is pervasive and requires a thoughtful, comprehensive approach to foster true recovery and reintegration into society. This dialogue is not just an exchange of ideas; it's a call to action for everyone in the community to step up and be a part of the solution. I appreciate the dedication shown by everyone involved in this issue. We all recognize the importance of addressing the challenges at hand. We're not just talking about the problems; we're actively working to change lives. I've seen firsthand how our efforts impact the community. We've distributed shoes and necessities to kids who stumbled upon us, some of whom were even without footwear. I remember a 14-year-old who confidently exchanged my boots for some of his, choosing to go barefoot for others in need.

This happened before shelters opened, and the reality was stark people had nowhere to go. We stayed up collecting blankets until 3 AM because that's what it takes. I am deeply connected to this reality, and we can't just rely on offices or bureaucracy. We need to address immediate needs on the street where families and children are struggling without support. The situation is only



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going to escalate if we don't get proactive. When we begin to see the fallout—an uptick in violence, overdose incidents, and drug-related arrests—we must ask ourselves: Are we truly helping these individuals by sending them to treatment centers for synthetic alternatives? Are we genuinely supporting them or simply maintaining a cycle of instability? At our program, we are equipped to meet people where they are. We've built resources such as a recording studio, a podcast space, and gaming stations—all aimed at connecting with youth. At just 24, I've seen and experienced my friends' struggles, so I understand their immediate needs. The connections we've forged stem from shared experiences.

When I was bullied about my size or my friends about theirs, it wasn't just the teasing—it was a reflection of our struggles. But if you can provide two blue bags to help feed a family when a mother hasn't returned home, of course, we'll do what we need to survive. It's often far easier for someone to opt for quick fixes rather than navigate a lengthy application process. The key is listening and bridging that disconnection. It's not just about telling them we care; it's about demonstrating it through actions that will stabilize their situation. When we stabilize local youth, we are indeed paving the way for a better future. Then, Chairman Sudler recognized Committee Member Joseph Bedford III. He emphasized that the foundation of change is rooted in families. Individuals will turn to trusted figures with whom they feel comfortable. As we engage with this community, we need to remember that we can't just bring programs and policies; we must foster genuine relationships on the ground.

We should approach individuals with understanding, not judgment—engaging with them as if they are family. It's about creating a supportive environment where we can work together to break the cycle and find pathways to success. By building these relationships, we can truly make an impact, and that's the vision we need to pursue. We care deeply and have walked this path ourselves. Coming from the suburbs of Dover, I understand the daily struggle with addiction, and it motivates me to be here today. Recently, Chairman Sudler acknowledged committee member Mr. Bedford and heard from Mr. Bobby Wilson, who passionately emphasized the need for action rather than just discussion. His point about the absence of Dover Parks and Recreation staff at our meetings was poignant. It's an opportunity for them to step up. This year, as we look forward to the annual concert series, I believe it's time to consider including hip-hop or rap events to cater to the youth in our community. There's a chance to create something vibrant and inclusive. Chairman Sudler also heard from another community member, Denner Gibson, who shared her heartfelt story.

She expressed gratitude for being at the meeting, and her reflections about childhood and parenting resonated with many of us. As we head into the future, it's vital to focus on families



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and the societal challenges they face. She pointed out that many children struggle due to their parents' battles, some even involving addiction, which we know can be hereditary. Denner's journey has been tough, having faced domestic violence, and her desire to be an advocate for children is inspiring. She reminded us that police and community members often lack the awareness needed to support those who are not in typical circumstances. Denner's experiences highlight the pressing need to address these issues and empower individuals like her, who are eager to help shape a more supportive community. As we move forward, it's crucial to ensure that those who face challenges, whether they're related to addiction or disability, receive the understanding and assistance they need. With her voice for the community, she is a testament to the resilience found in adversity. We have the chance to change narratives, engage parents, and ultimately create a safer environment for our children. As we anticipate future discussions and actions, it's a reminder that we must rally together.

Everyone has a role to play, and together we can foster hope and healing in our neighborhoods. In a recent community discussion, Mrs. Gibson passionately addressed the need for a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by individuals and families dealing with substance abuse. She emphasized that the issue often stems from a cycle of trauma and inherited struggles, where drug dependency can be seen almost as a disease tied to one's genetic makeup. Mrs. Gibson pointed out that society frequently resorts to punitive measures, opting to incarcerate individuals rather than providing supportive solutions that can heal families and communities. She highlighted the profound psychological impact children face when exposed to domestic violence, recalling her own journey from homelessness and the stigma that accompanies mental health struggles. Her experience taught her that many individuals dealing with addiction are often those who seek to escape their painful pasts, and it's crucial to provide support that extends beyond just the physical addiction to opioids or crack cocaine.

Mrs. Gibson underlined that addiction does not discriminate; it affects people of all races and socioeconomic backgrounds, and addressing it effectively requires a focus on poverty and the systemic issues that perpetuate it. She argued that fostering understanding and compassion—rather than judgment—could significantly change outcomes for those struggling with addiction. By investing in programs targeted at families, particularly in impoverished communities, we can help break the cycle of addiction, offering resources that support parents and safeguard children from the trauma of their surroundings. She concluded with a call to prioritize mental health support, emphasizing the importance of seeing individuals as more than their addiction. Following Mrs. Gibson, Chairman Sudler acknowledged her insightful feedback and welcomed another community member, Belinda Main. Belinda shared her perspective on the pervasive



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influence of social media and digital platforms like TikTok and YouTube. She pointed out that it's not just teenagers who are affected; even children as young as 3 are absorbing messages from these platforms.

Balancing her role as a parent to six children, she expressed concern about the disconnect children feel when seeking help or discussing their struggles, often driven by fear of disappointing their parents or peers. Belinda also shared her personal struggle with type 2 diabetes, illustrating how her three-year-old daughter is beginning to grasp complex concepts about health. While she took her insulin, her little girl would innocently mimic the actions associated with these medical needs, showing the importance of parental guidance in navigating health issues. Belinda made it clear that while medications can be necessary, it's imperative to distinguish between therapeutic drugs and harmful substances like opioids, which pose serious risks, especially to youth. Moreover, she highlighted the challenges faced by her son, who occasionally encounters bullying from peers, particularly those from single-parent households. She recognized that some children might channel their frustration and aggression toward quieter classmates, suggesting a need for greater empathy and understanding among all students. Belinda committed to keeping a close eye on her children, ensuring they remain strong and resist negative influences while fostering open communication about making healthy, informed choices.

Both Mrs. Gibson and Belinda exemplified the real-world challenges families face while addressing larger social issues, making a compelling case for community and systemic support to break the cycles of violence and addiction, and to nurture a healthier future for all children. This will empower you to rise above and become greater than those around you. I have a teenage daughter, and I'm vigilant about her well-being. She often asks about what she sees on YouTube, and I take the time to explain things to her. Not long ago, when my daughter was in public school, a friend would visit almost every evening around dinner time. I sensed something wasn't right at home, so I asked her, and she shared that her mom worked nights, her dad was away, and her sister didn't want to help. I realized this child sought refuge in my home because she knew it was a safe place. I welcomed her for dinner, not as a burden, but as an opportunity to help someone in need. I encouraged her to knock on my door if she ever felt unsafe or needed assistance. A month later, two girls came by, joyfully proclaiming, "God is good, God is great!" They explained that my house was known as the "safe house." That label resonated deeply with me. I've always thought of a safe house as a refuge for those in trouble, and I realized my home had become that space for these kids—where they could seek help and support.



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No one enters my home without welcome; I have my two dogs and enough determination to protect everyone within. I enjoy connecting with people, always ready to offer compassion. If I see someone in distress, I ask what's wrong, always pushing to find a solution that keeps them safe and cared for. I've had my share of hardships, and I know the impact of those early experiences. Though I have had nightmares from my past, I also learned resilience. My biological father struggled with addiction, and my mother faced challenges that led to family separation. Decades later, I reconnected with my siblings, some still battling their demons. I offer them support when I can but also encourage them to seek a better path. I believe in positivity, especially for those who have served their time and are reentering society. It's crucial not to let past mistakes define the future. I tell my children and their friends that even as a non-foster parent, I feel like a mother to many. Parents trust my home, and when conflicts arise, I reach out to listen and support, creating a safe space for open dialogue.

If I don't have an answer, I will seek help. My desire to become a psychologist stems from my passion for guiding youth, especially those from single-parent households. It's about lifting each other. Chairman Sudler recognized this call to action and invited me to collaborate on initiatives to support our youth within the Capitol School District. Together, we can make a meaningful impact, and the more involved we are, the stronger our community becomes. Chairman Sudler acknowledged community member Denner Gibson from the Living Institute Career Academy. Denner expressed heartfelt gratitude to everyone present, emphasizing the urgency of the issues at hand. Although he isn't a resident of Dover, he shares the struggles many faces, as his 13-year-old son lives in Baltimore and navigates challenges that are all too familiar. Denner brought up the serious matter of the blue streetlights affecting visibility for those dealing with addiction, highlighting the complexity of such struggles. He reflected on a personal experience with his father, who is recovering from addiction. It was a moving moment as he shared his father's journey and how the family continues to support him.

These issues are not just black-and-white; they resonate deeply, lasting for years and affecting relationships. He pointed out the common themes that have emerged from the stories shared, particularly the need for connection and community. Denner shared that to inspire genuine change in someone's life, authentic connections are vital. If we haven't moved through the struggles someone else is enduring, they may be hesitant to hear our words. This is especially true for today's youth, who are living in an era of overwhelming information and rapid changes. Many millennials, Denner shared how he was taught the path to success—go to school, secure a job, attend college—but many have seen that path falter for an entire generation. As children today navigate a world full of social media platforms, it's clear that merely shielding them from



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exposure isn't a realistic solution. Instead, we can significantly impact their self-concept and self-worth. Denner emphasized that some children grow up in harsh environments yet never engage in harmful behaviors, not necessarily because of a perfect upbringing, but because of the support and belief others have instilled in them.

He also emphasized the importance of mentorship, noting that our youth can thrive when they encounter individuals who recognize their potential. The discussion highlighted the challenges faced by young people in environments that should promote nurturing but, unfortunately, sometimes make them feel undervalued. This leads to a defensive mindset, especially among youth who crave love and connection, which are often missing from their home lives. When they face a world that only values them for superficial reasons, it creates a troubling reality. Denner brought attention to the alarming instances of suicide among young children, who possess a stark understanding of life, often greater than many adults today. They see and experience a world that we cannot fully comprehend, often without the context to navigate it. This is where we must step in with compassion and understanding. Denner reiterated the need to approach these conversations fearlessly sharing our experiences to guide youth without dictating their paths, demonstrating that choices exist beyond the immediate and the easy.

He acknowledged that while it might seem easier to take risky shortcuts, there are alternative paths available, emphasizing the importance of showing our youth that they deserve better. As we observe the evolving landscape of commerce, particularly in the digital sphere, it becomes evident that younger generations—having grown up with pervasive technology—are uniquely positioned to capitalize on these changes. Unlike older cohorts who were primarily shaped by a pre-digital environment, today's youth are accustomed to the omnipresence of advertisements and online interactions, which are now empirically understood to influence consumer behavior after repeated exposures, commonly referred to as the "11 touches" rule. It is imperative for us, as seasoned members of society, to recognize the vital role that these young individuals will play in shaping the future economy. Rather than stifling their ambition, we should aim to channel their entrepreneurial spirit into constructive avenues. This means creating supportive frameworks that not only provide a source of catharsis but also contribute to sustainable lifestyles.

For instance, individuals emerging from addiction often face significant barriers when reintegrating into the workforce; traditional employment models frequently overlook their potential, resulting in feelings of rejection and disillusionment. However, we can facilitate pathways that highlight the intrinsic value of their experiences. There exists a substantial demographic of individuals who could benefit from hearing their narratives, especially when such messages come from those who genuinely understand their struggles. This need is



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underscored by the prevalent stigma surrounding mental health, particularly within certain cultural contexts. Addressing these issues is complex. The socio-economic landscape in America, compounded by factors such as undocumented immigration and systemic inequities, means that many individuals face significant obstacles from a young age. The societal framework historically rooted in the marginalization of specific communities has persisted, leading to a penal system that disproportionately affects vulnerable populations.

We must therefore be proactive in redefining the self-perception of youth, empowering them to see themselves as capable individuals rather than products of their circumstances. It is crucial that we engage with them authentically, considering their perspectives rather than imposing outdated paradigms. They are disenchanted with the narratives perpetuated by prior generations—narratives that resulted in economic instability and unfulfilled aspirations. Instead, they are inspired by contemporary figures in digital entrepreneurship—streamers, podcasters, and online creators—who embody the new path forward. The goal should not only be to endorse creative endeavors but to guide these individuals toward successful entrepreneurial ventures where their passions can translate into viable income streams. This is particularly essential for youth navigating complex family dynamics, facing economic instability, or lacking adequate support systems. Strengthening their self-concept and resilience is vital for breaking cycles of poverty and recidivism.

As mentors and community leaders, it is our responsibility to illuminate pathways for these individuals. By fostering environments that uplift and empower, we can help them transcend their initial circumstances. If we equip them with a robust sense of self-worth and purpose, they will be less impacted by external negativity. Ultimately, the integration of proactive systems within education and community support frameworks will be key. By bolstering their self-concept, we can instill confidence that remains steadfast, irrespective of external challenges. This journey, while multifaceted, hinges on a larger commitment to mentoring and developing the next generation, ensuring they not only withstand adversity but thrive beyond it. The theoretical framework we are exploring includes the theater variable, which addresses positive youth development interventions. This perspective emphasizes the importance of self-reflection through a positive youth development lens. Additionally, we will integrate concepts from trauma theory and general systems theory, using a transdisciplinary approach to view various entities, whether biological, social, or mechanical—as interconnected systems rather than isolated components. Much of our discussion aligns with the theoretical foundations we aim to establish through this research. I want to express my gratitude to everyone's valuable feedback.



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Chairman Sudler then recognized Mr. Johnson, who offered a thoughtful reflection on Mr. Parker's comment about children's desire for activities such as visiting a trampoline park. Drawing from my experience with various programs, I recall the Traxxas program in Milford, which focused on supporting youth facing challenges within the community. This initiative provided an alternative educational framework, facilitating learning for students who were struggling in traditional settings. Participants received academic support through their school's curriculum, and after school, dedicated counselors organized enriching outings, including trips to amusement parks and other recreational activities. The program was effective, but unfortunately, it was relocated and subsequently disbanded. In my experience running the 6 for 1 program at the Howard Road Young Correctional Center, I worked closely with individuals transitioning from the street to the judicial system. Director Prince entrusted me with this responsibility because of the compassion I demonstrated toward these individuals.

I initiated a program called "Write for Me," which encouraged participants to write letters to themselves. This exercise allowed them to reflect on their lives and share their insights with me, fostering a deeper understanding of their identities. Following this, we introduced the "Expression in the Rain" session, providing a safe space for participants to express their feelings, often leading to emotional breakthroughs. This initiative strengthened our connections, and at the end of the program, we celebrated our growth together. Despite my transition to other endeavors, I maintain contact with many individuals from the program who have since found success in their lives. As Mr. Paker mentioned, it is essential to focus on solutions as we face challenges.

I propose we organize transportation for troubled youth to engage them in positive activities and experiences in our community. By creating these opportunities, we can help foster a more supportive environment for their development. I want to emphasize a critical opportunity we have to make a significant impact on our community, especially for our youth. As we wrap up summer, we must unite—not as individuals, but as a powerful collective committed to the betterment of our city. During our recent meeting, we thoroughly discussed essential recommendations from the Opioid Use Disorder Task Force, driven by the Mayor's Blue-Ribbon Initiative. These recommendations are not just proposals; they are a necessary action plan to address the urgent issues surrounding opioid use disorders and to support our youth. I urge you to take a stand with us as we prepare to present our sixth recommendation to the Mayor and the City Council.



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Here are the key recommendations we have approved and why they are crucial:

1. **Investment in Detox Treatment Center Infrastructure:** We must invest in a state-of-the-art detox center that includes comprehensive services. This facility will be staffed with specialized addiction therapists and social workers who deliver evidence-based therapeutic programs to tackle opioid use disorders effectively. This investment is non-negotiable for the health of our community.

2. **Enhancement of Behavioral Health Integrations:** We must expand treatment centers and boost the workforce of peer-supported specialists. A holistic support network is essential for fostering prevention and recovery, and we can no longer ignore this need.

3. **Expansion of Telehealth Services:** We need to broaden treatment options for opioid use disorders by enhancing telehealth services. This is crucial in ensuring accessibility and significantly improving patients' management of their behavioral and emotional needs.

4. **Data and Research:** We must conduct comprehensive research to deepen our understanding of the risks associated with opioid use and to inform effective harm reduction strategies. Engaging with those who face these challenges is necessary for collecting vital insights that will guide our interventions.

5. **Mobile Intervention Units:** We will deploy mobile units to provide immediate referrals to harm reduction services. This targeted approach is vital to ensure that all individuals suffering from opioid use disorders receive timely and accessible support.

6. **Youth-Focused Campaigns:** *Supporting community coalitions in implementing evidence-informed prevention*, such as reduced social access and physical access, stigma reduction—including staffing, educational campaigns, support for people in treatment or recovery, or training of coalitions in evidence-informed implementation, including the Strategic Prevention Framework developed by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (“SAMHSA”).

Engaging non-profits and faith-based communities as systems to support prevention.

School-based or youth-focused programs or strategies that have demonstrated effectiveness in preventing drug misuse and seem likely to be effective in preventing the uptake and use of opioids.

At this moment, we look forward to addressing any questions about the six recommendations that will pave the way for future initiatives. Chairman Sudler recognizes a community member



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who expresses curiosity about the six recommendations. The community members wonder if there are six specific parties of interest or if there are six entities that will need to apply for the grant. In response, Chairman Sudler shares his anticipation about the six recommendations. He explains that the committee has examined the overall use of the guidelines for remediation and has identified six key areas they aim to present to the mayor and council. He clarifies that, for now, no specific individuals have been chosen to take on these responsibilities; rather, a competitive application process will allow various organizations to apply. The goal is to address these critical areas that have been deemed necessary for future development. The community member then clarifies: "So you're saying you haven't selected these six areas yet?" Chairman Sudler affirms, stating that while the committee has identified the categories, they haven't pinpointed the specific entities. He emphasizes that they look forward to the competitive grant process, in which both non-profit and for-profit organizations, as well as municipalities, can vie for funding.

An exciting aspect of the recommendations is strong advocacy for the Dover School District, focusing on a youth-centered campaign with significant potential for impact. This initiative is set to be a committee recommendation to the mayor, and they see it as a promising start toward expanding scientific knowledge of addiction and its side effects, while also providing solutions moving forward. He highlights the competitive nature of the funding and expresses optimism that programs aligned with these six focus areas will step forward to present their best ideas. After this clarification, the community member expresses gratitude to Chairman Sudler. He turns to committee member Bernard Pratt, who is eager to move forward with the chair's recommendation to approve the youth-focused research campaign. This motion is expected to gain the backing of the mayor and be forwarded to the prescription opioid settlement commission for the allocation of general grants over \$30,000.

Enthusiastically, the motion receives a second from committee member Chelle Paul and is passed unanimously by the Mayor's Blue-Ribbon OUD Taskforce Committee. Before the meeting wraps up, Chairman Sudler is pleased to recognize Councilman Brian Lewis of District 2, who graciously accepts the acknowledgment. He's here to listen to the committee's discussion because he believes listening is crucial to moving forward effectively. He draws upon his extensive experience to emphasize the seriousness of the addiction problem in the state, underscoring the importance of using the upcoming funds wisely. The emphasis on oversight resonates with Councilman Lewis as he expresses his commitment to ensuring that the community benefits directly from these resources. With such shared goals, attendees are eager to



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ensure responsible usage of funding that will truly support the youth and the community at large. I have a two-year-old grandchild, and it's essential to keep him engaged.

When children aren't occupied, they tend to explore potentially dangerous situations. This principle also applies to the youth in Dover who are drawn to gangs, often stemming from dysfunctional family environments. We must proactively provide constructive activities to divert them from negative influences. I wholeheartedly support the sentiments expressed by the speakers tonight. Our city is in a state of crisis; we face significant challenges that require immediate attention. Many of our leaders are not taking adequate action. As my grandmother used to say, "Action speaks louder than words." We need to act decisively and ensure that resources are allocated effectively to support our community. I am calling on all of you to join us at the City Council meeting on the fourth Monday of this month. Your presence is critical. We cannot afford to miss this opportunity to drive positive changes and make a lasting impact. Together, we will ensure that \$350,000 is directed towards these essential initiatives. Let's act, support our youth, and shape a healthier Capital of Delaware.

SYNOPSIS:

To effectively address our constituents' concerns about the OUD crisis and the allocation of State Opioid Response (SOR) funding grants in the Capital of Delaware, we must first recognize the profound challenges our young people face. It is essential that we not only listen but also equip them with the tools they need for meaningful improvement. Words alone will not suffice; we need to take decisive, actionable steps to foster growth within our community. As Local Officials, we must work together and engage in constructive dialogue to create real change. We must show that personal and community growth is attainable for everyone. Supporting our Council Leadership is vital, and it's our responsibility to ensure they are held accountable for the effective allocation of State Opioid Response (SOR) funding grants. By pooling our resources and expertise, we can drive meaningful legal and institutional reforms that directly enhance the lives of our residents. Together, we can make significant strides toward a healthier and more just future. Thank you for your unwavering commitment to addressing this critical issue and for standing alongside our community in this vital mission.

The meeting was adjourned at **7:56 p.m.**

Submitted By:

Roy Sudler, Jr. Ph.D.

Chairman of Mayor's

OUD Taskforce Committee