



OPIOID SETTLEMENT

Minutes



Committee Members:

Kathy Bryant, Marion County Government
Judge Robert Landt, Fifth Judicial Circuit
Teresa Stephens, Marion County Hospital District
Capt. Jesse Blaire, Ocala Fire Dept.
Christy Jergens, Marion County Health Dept.
Sheriff Billy Woods, Marion County Sheriff's Dept.

Beth McCall, Marion County Children's Alliance
Chief Mike Balken, Ocala Police Dept.
Ire Bethea Sr., City of Ocala
Dep. Chief Robert Kruger, Marion County Fire Dept.
Ben Marciano, Active Recovery Representative

Thursday, March 12, 2026 at 11 a.m.

Location: 2710 E Silver Springs Blvd. Ocala, FL 34470

CALL TO ORDER

The Regional Opioid Settlement Committee met in regular session at 11:00am on Thursday, March 12, 2026 at the Marion County Growth Services Building in Conference Room A.

PLEDGE

The meeting was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of our Country.

PUBLIC NOTICE

The meeting was noted as advertised on March 5, 2026 in accordance with Florida Sunshine Laws.

ROLL CALL

Upon roll call the following members were present: Ben Marciano, Beth McCall, Christy Jergens, Ire Bethea Sr., Captain Jesse Blaire, Chief Mike Balken, Chief Robert Kruger, and Teresa Stephens. A quorum was established. The following members were excused: Kathy Bryant, Judge Robert Landt, and Sheriff Billy Woods. Also present was: Pete Lee, Sarah Ostreicher, Robin Lanier, Crystal Pfriendr, Curt Bromund, Crystal Watkins, Dana Dammar, William Sexton, Tom Schwartz, Todd Hockert, Cheryl Butler, Kendall Stephens, Sean Glancy, Lauren Blaugh, Roberta Cincotti, Sefrina Boodram, and Rob Massi.

A quorum was present.

- 1. Request Approval of the January 8, 2026 Meeting Minutes:** Vice Chair Beth McCall, Marion County Children's Alliance, called for a motioned to approve the meeting minutes from the January 8th meeting, Councilman Ire Bethea, City of Ocala, motioned to approve the minutes and Chief Kruger, Marion County Fire Rescue (MCFR), seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

- 2. Priority Updates:**

2.1 Project Updates – Updates were provided to the committee through the March 2026 Committee Projects Update handout. Crystal Pfriendr, Marion County Hospital District (MCHD), highlighted several key updates from the handout, including that \$2,476,965 in regional opioid settlement funds had been distributed to date. Robin Lanier, SMA Healthcare, shared that SMA is currently in Phase 2 of the remodel of its Central Receiving Facility, which includes a new administration and detoxification area. She stated that Phase 2 is expected to be operational by June 1, with the third and final phase anticipated to be completed by November. A ribbon-cutting ceremony is planned upon completion of the project. Cheryl Butler, Marion County Community Services (MCCS), shared that her

department has been coordinating with MCHD staff regarding project progress and reiterated that all relevant updates are included in the handout.

2.2 Application Recommendations – N/A

3. **2026-2027 Priorities:** Cheryl Butler directed the committee's attention to the draft Proposed Priorities for FY 2026–2027 handout. She reminded the committee that a new Opioid Plan must be submitted annually to DCF by July 1. She shared that, in coordination with MCHD, the proposed priorities include maintaining all current priorities with additional funding allocated to each. She also noted that a new strategy, in the amount of \$100,000, is being proposed to address the needs of criminal justice-involved individuals, referencing Schedule B, Letter D, of the Statewide Response Agreement. Chief Kruger asked a clarifying question regarding the proposed funding allocations. Mayor Ben Marciano, City of Ocala, requested an overview of the new priority area. Cheryl clarified that no vote was necessary at this time, as staff was seeking feedback prior to the June 11 meeting, during which the committee will formally vote on the proposed priorities. She further explained that the priorities will then be presented to the Board of County Commissioners and subsequently submitted to the State of Florida. Ben Marciano commended Wear Gloves' Dignity House Project for its outstanding work and expressed his support for its inclusion among the funded projects. Vice Chair Beth McCall requested an update on Open Arms Village, and it was clarified that the project remains in the planning phases.
4. **Financial Update:** Kendall Stephens, MCCS, stated that the Year 4 distribution in the amount of \$1,671,756.53 had been received and was larger than anticipated. She further shared that, after approval of the FY 2026–2027 priorities totaling \$2,075,000, a remaining balance of \$1,121,565.69 would remain unallocated. Vice Chair Beth McCall asked whether there were any other viable projects available for funding. MCHD clarified that additional applications had been received; however, no projects were ready to be presented for approval at this time.
5. **Announcements:** Cheryl Butler shared the following:
 - Applications for Marion County Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Trust Fund are currently being accepted and are due 3/27/26
 - 2026-2027 CDBG funding is available as well as several other funding sources overseen by the Community Services department. Cheryl invited the committee to send referrals to the department for projects that may qualify for these other funding sources.
 - There is a need to reschedule the September meeting for August, and a poll will be sent out to the committee

Vice Chair Beth McCall requested a funding summary to better understand where there was additional funding available and what the funds could be used for. Sean Glancy, MCCS, touched on this briefly and committed to sending a funding summary out to the committee.

6. **Data Report Out:** Chief Kruger presented data from January 1 through March 6 regarding opioid-related transports, noting a slight downward trend. He shared that MCFR and the Health Department will coordinate moving forward to provide a single consolidated data report to the committee. Christy Jergens, Florida Department of Health, also reported several additional downward trends, including decreases in drug poisoning fatalities and opioid-related emergency room visits. She further shared information regarding a new initiative in partnership with Marion County involving the installation of Narcan cabinets in libraries and parks. Distribution activity has been especially high at the Headquarters and Dunnellon libraries, which may help inform targeted intervention efforts. Discussion ensued regarding the Narcan cabinet initiative.
7. **Public Comments: N/A**

8. **Committee Comments:** Chief Balkan, Ocala Police Department, asked for clarification around MAT success rates and program outcomes. The committee discussed an 80% success rate for participants remaining engaged at 90 days compared to a 22% national average. Robin Lanier clarified success is attributed to intensive support, including transportation assistance, 24hr contacts and coordination with providers to prevent service gaps. Councilman Ire Bethea commented on Wear Gloves and commended them for the work that they do in the community. Chief Balkan asked for clarification around Wear Gloves' capacity.

ADJOURNMENT

The next scheduled meeting is on Thursday, June 11, 2026, with a new location to be determined and communicated to the committee. The meeting adjourned at 11:35am.

Chair Signature: 