



North Alabama Mental Health Coalition

Meeting minutes for April 14, 2026

Attendees (in person):

Daniel Adamek (Little Orange Fish)	Margie Annis	Sarah Bailey (UAH RAN)
Jennifer Blazer (ALSP)	Annie Brasseale (VOP)	Mark Burnett (NAMI)
Sonia Burnett	Tom Butler (Ala State Senator)	Melissa Caldwell (Wellstone)
Adasia Cash (CNAHSI)	Rudolfo Chavez (SVDP)	Karen Chillcott (Victory Alliance Ranch)
Ann Clark (ADMH)	Staci Cochran (PDFC)	Roxanne Crawford (Bradford at Madison)
Scott Erwin (City of Huntsville)	Jeremy Fassina (Montgomery Behavioral)	Melissa Foster (UAH Nursing)
Jennifer Gentry (Long Leaf Centers)	Kelly Goff (The Riley Center)	Tindra Hammett (SSCAL)
Traci Harris (Elm Foundation)	Alexis Harvey (ALSP)	Linda Howe (Just Serve)
Marc Hultquist (Regan's Clinic)	Michael Katschke (Heritage Church)	Suzanne Katschke (NAMI)
Caroline Kattos (Wellstone)	Kimberly Lamar (Magnolia Ranch Rec)	Marilyn Lands (State Rep. District 10)
Tammy Leeth (Probate Judge's Office)	Clinton Martin (UAB Medical Center)	Michael Mathis (Q.U.E Train & Wellness)
Beth McAnally (NOMA)	Barry Moore (Franklin Cty Probate Judge)	Jessica Nall (PDFC)
Tom O'Donnell (SVDP)	Sydnee Oates (CNAHSI)	Leigh Oliver (Thrive AL)
Carol Pepe (SSCAL)	Karen Petersen (Wellstone)	Brandy Rains (Marshall County)
Audrey Rushing (Not One More Alabama)	Julie Schenck-Brown (Huntsville Police)	Joy Seuis (Wellstone)
Leslie Shepard	Holly Strayer (SSCAL)	Mina Takahashi (UAB Medical Center)
Brittany Williams (Alliance)	Kendall Williams (First Stop)	Latisha Wilson (ADMH)
Mack Yates (SVDP/VOP)	Anupama Yedla (UAB Medical Center)	Parker Moore (State Rep. District 4)

1. Welcome and Introductions – Mack Yates

Mack welcomed everyone and thanked the dean of the College of Nursing at UAH (Dr. Karen Fritz) for providing a location for this month's meeting. He also thanked Prof. Melissa Foster for her work and support which made this meeting possible.

The legislators introduced themselves. In attendance were:

- [Rep. Parker Moore \(District 4\)](#)
- Franklin County Probate [Judge Barry Moore](#), <https://franklincountyal.org/departments/>
- [Rep. Marilyn Lands \(District 10\)](#)
- [Senator Tom Butler](#).

Mack gave an introduction, noting that there is an overall lack of support (legal and otherwise) for families with someone who experiences serious psychotic episodes. Too often, psychotic problems are seen as character or behavioral issues rather than as a brain chemistry issue.

2. Coalition Updates – Daniel Adamek

Sarah Baily mentioned that RAN (Regional Autism Network) is hosting Dr. Temple Grandin at UAH on October 8th which also happens to be Fall Break for Huntsville City Schools. More information to come in May.

RAN is also piloting ARNIE (an autism resource navigation tool). They arranged for 45 UAH nursing students to interact with the tool last week. It will also be available to try out at the Little Orange Fish fundraiser on May 9th.

Jessica with Partnership for a Drug Free community mentioned that they are having a Spring Soiree fundraiser on April 22. Tickets are \$5 and allow access to the auctions. April 25 is Drug Takeback Day in multiple areas in Huntsville and Decatur.

Daniel reminded attendees that there is a calendar on the coalition website (www.NorthAlabamaMentalHealthCoalition.org). He encouraged members to send him details for upcoming events (including links).

Little Orange Fish (LOF) has a fundraiser on May 9 at Stovehouse from 2 to 6pm. It is a family friendly event and he encouraged members of the coalition to attend.

Joy Seueis (SUD director at Wellstone) gave a presentation on the Substance Use programs available through Wellstone. The NOVA center focuses on ages 13 to 18. Adult Outpatient services are provided through the New Horizons Recovery Center in Huntsville, Cullman, and now in Madison. MAT (Medication Assisted Treatment) does have to be initiated at WES (Wellstone Emergency Services). River Crossing is Wellstone's detox facility (opened in July of last year) and River Valley is located in Hazel Green.

River Crossing is the first detox facility in Huntsville. They are state funded, so people need to be assessed before they are admitted. It is a 16-bed coed facility with stays averaging from 5 to 7 days (longer if necessary). They will take clients from WES. They offer group, individual therapy, and peer support. Criteria for admissions are ages 19 and older with immediate risk of withdrawals (alcohol and opioids). Assessments are typically performed at Wellstone with walk-ins available M-F, but they can be performed elsewhere and sent to Wellstone.

Treatment is prioritized and given to pregnant women, IV users, women with children, and then those who are HIV positive.

River Valley is a 16-bed coed facility located in Hazel Green. There are 2 levels of care: 3.3 is up to 120 days and 3.5 which is up to 30 days or until treatment has been completed. Assessments are also provided at Wellstone and Substance Use Disorder must be the primary diagnosis. They accept users 19 and older. Group therapy is provided daily and individual therapy is provided once per week. All registration goes through Access to Care at Wellstone. She had flyers available at the meeting. The River Crossing website is rivercrossing@wellstone.com and the River Valley website is rivervalley@wellstone.com. Joy's email is joy.seuis@wellstone.com.

Suzanne Katchze mentioned that the Huntsville affiliate of NAMI disbanded, but the national NAMI organization approved a NAMI Madison County in March. They are currently offering a Connections support group (people living with mental illness), a family support group (led by Mark), and also a Family-to-Family class (an 8-week class). They didn't have enough people in March to do a class, but they are maintaining a list and will offer it soon. She asked everyone to spread the word that we now have a NAMI in Madison County. You can go on the national website and become a member. They are still forming team and looking for help. She distributed cards to coalition members listing the website (not operational until late April) – namimadisoncountyalabama.org.

3. Featured Presentation

– A Mother's Story: Systemic Mental Health Failures and Opportunities to Reform – Tindra Hammett, Mom, Mental Health

Mack introduced Holly Strayer, who is the Alabama State director of the National Shattering Silence Coalition. They are a grass roots organization hoping to break down systemic failures in care for no fault brain disorders (Severe Mental Illness – SMI). Holly introduced Tindra Hammett to share the story of her son, River.

Tindra shared a presentation of River's story. He was a normal young child until a brain disorder affected him in his early 20s. His story reveals gaps in Alabama's mental health support.

Tindra spoke on behalf of the National Shattering Silence Coalition in Alabama. She mentioned that, as a mother, she did everything she could and the doctor did everything that he could and the system still failed.

On October 29th, 2024 the situation turned deadly. There were warning signs - history, documentation, and a bed available. The system let her son fall through the cracks and another person lost their life as a result. He had been involuntarily committed to the Gadsden Regional Psychiatric Unit in Etowah County. In January, after he was released, he overdosed on medications prescribed by his provider. He went back to the hospital, but then River stopped going to therapy and appointments even though he was under a court order. The system stopped monitoring him. He was unmedicated for 5 months and Tindra did not know. The treatment had stopped, the court order had expired, and her son was slipping away.

She explained that even with insurance, the cost of treatments was crushing. River's monthly shot was expensive and he could not afford it. He went to Alabama Psychiatric to get treatment again. He was with professionals who knew him. The court mandate had expired and he had stopped taking his meds (except at night). Months passed and he became worse even with monthly appointments. He then stopped spending time with his family. By October, they knew he needed help. She didn't know what to do, so she asked for a welfare check from the sheriff's office. River was aggressive and delusional. He asked to leave and he was free to leave because he hadn't committed a crime. That is a problem with the system, we wait too long until the person in crisis hurts themselves and/ or someone else.

River then went into silence. Tindra felt that once he went to his provider, his medications would be adjusted and things would improve. On the way to the appointment, he was paranoid and upset. They arrived at the clinic and she told the provider that her son had changed mentally. The provider agreed with Tindra's concern. His outpatient commitment had expired and he needed to go to involuntary commitment. This was a documented psychiatric emergency. A bed was available at the Gadsden Regional Psychiatric Unit, but River was *not* taken there. The mental health officer asked if he was suicidal or if he might hurt others. River lied and he knew what he needed to say. Severe mental illness does not always present loudly. They can refuse treatment and say that they are fine. They can appear normal. The system should have listened to the people who knew him best. A psychiatrist had already identified the danger and a bed was available, yet Tindra was told to drive to the next county to file papers with the probate office. Her son was in psychosis and she had to drive to get signatures.

She dropped River off because there was nothing to do. The provider recommended that she file papers in Etowah County because they were already familiar with River. She went to the Etowah courthouse to get help, but because River was in Marshall County she had to return there to file papers. County lines should never dictate whether a person in psychosis gets emergency treatment. Danger does not wait for paper work. Families should not have to drive all over while their loved one is in crisis.

Tindra is asking for a "River Alert" – a severe mental emergency system so that when a known person with mental illness is in crisis, a warning can be issued regardless of which county they are in. They should be able to be taken to the nearest available bed. She had to go to Marshall County and fill out paperwork. She was told to come back the next morning. The crisis was immediate and by then, it was too late. River had stabbed someone at Western Sizzling. She had been trying all day to prevent a crisis and it had happened because of delays in the system.

This should not have happened. The professionals were concerned but action was not taken because of the slowness of the system and the fact that it is dependent upon county lines. She is asking for reform. She is asking for a River Alert – severe mental health alert that spans county lines. She wants authority for cross-county communication between doctors, courts, and law enforcement officers. There should be transport to the closest available facility regardless of the county. There should be more accountability when a mental health

officer overrides a doctor's recommendation. There should be longer court order outpatient treatment for those previously involuntarily committed...as long as is necessary. Psychiatric doctors should have the authority to initiate commitment action, and the families shouldn't be passed around and have to bear the burden. Families are not case managers or emergency response systems. Mothers should not have to go from county to county to save their children and to protect the public.

She is not here to excuse violence, but she believes that this death was preventable. A doctor saw the danger and a bed was available, but the system didn't help. This is a policy failure and a jurisdictional failure. Severe mental illness is not just a private family matter – it can be a public safety issue. Do not let Oct 29, 2024 be just another day. Mental illness crises should be able to warrant a statewide response. When her son needed the system to work, it did not help.

She went over the recommendations for changes in the system. She is asking for a River Alert system (severe mental health alert for a fast statewide response to someone in active mental health crisis. It would provide for real time cross-county communication between law enforcement, clinicians, and courts. It would also provide quick location for transport and placement into treatment. Families should not have to wait for violence before the system responds. Because we already have an alert system in place (Amber), this could be added to that and only alert officials who are able to access additional pertinent information. Emergency detainers would be available across county lines with this bill. It would prevent delays and mandate transport to the nearest accepting facility. Psychosis does not stop at county lines. Systems should be built around urgency and risk, and not based on geography.

We need longer assisted out-patient treatment to break the relapse cycle. Assisted out-patient treatment should be at least 36 months or longer depending on the situation. There needs to be more monitoring for medication and appointment compliance. There is a difference between short-term stabilization and long-term recovery. Short-term stays often fail people when they need a long-term facility to learn how to take their meds and maintain stability. There should be accountability and training for first responders, especially when a clinician's recommendation is overridden. A person in psychosis can appear calm. Mental health officers should be required to have appropriate mental health and psychosis training.

Treatment can prevent tragedy. Families are tired of hearing that there is no money. They are tired of severe mental health being ignored until someone is harmed or dies and the patient is jailed. This is not a private family matter - it is a medical emergency. When it is ignored, it becomes a public safety issue. When someone is in psychosis, they need treatment and intervention. Families are told to wait and while they wait, loved ones are being lost. You would never tell a family whose loved one is having a stroke or heart attack that they have to wait. A severe mental health crisis should be no different.

Why are we still accepting excuses? Our families deserve better. We need treatment *before* tragedy and action *before* more violence occurs. Let your legislators know that we are tired of excuses. Treatment saves lives. Alabama needs to act.

Someone asked about her son's current situation. Her son is in jail and is still not taking his meds. He is on a waiting list for a forensic bed (364 on the list).

Someone said the waiting list for Taylor Harding is very long and it took 2 ½ years for their son to get a bed.

A question was asked about how long it took to have a psychiatric assessment done after River had the incident that put him in jail. Tindra said he was in jail for 2 ½ weeks before he was assessed and that was quick because she had gone to the media with the story.

Another person asked about his trial for murder. Tindra said he is deemed incompetent to stand trial currently. The lawyer said they are trying to get him stable enough to stand trial and if that doesn't happen, she thinks he will probably just go to Taylor Harding when space becomes available. She understands that her son committed a crime and she is not trying to get him out, but she wants to help others to avoid more situations like this.

Mack brought up the point that the law asks the person questions and the person can outwardly appear to be calm and competent, because they are convinced that they are not sick. To an untrained eye, they do not seem to need help. They are able to fool the system.

Holly mentioned that when someone is in psychosis, it is a medical emergency that needs to be treated right away. Unfortunately, our system doesn't act until something bad happens. No other medical condition is treated this way and ignored. We need to demand change to the system.

Another person asked who are the legislative partners who will push for this law. At this time, they don't have one. They are just trying to get the message out to the public.

Rep. Parker Moore spoke and said he had a cousin that this happened to and he took his own life. He said he wants to do what he can to help with this situation. Rep. Marilyn Lands also said she would help.

Someone added that there needs to be a longer hold in the hospital and the family needs to be aware of the situation that their loved one is facing. Many times, the family is blind to information and the person is sent home for the family to take care of and they don't know what to do.

A challenge was made to the organizations in the room to try and help with these situations. There needs to be increased capacity long term. Crises like this continue to occur.

The point was made that there is no way to force these people in psychosis to take their meds. It was compared to someone having Alzheimer's and those patients are watched so they won't harm themselves. They have a neurological brain disorder just like someone in psychosis, but we are allowed to make decisions for someone with Alzheimer's. The same is not true for someone with psychosis.

The need for increased capacity for long-term care was brought up. Mack mentioned that if someone relapses, the paperwork starts all over again.

Tindra mentioned that the state is building new prisons and asked why they can't add forensic beds to those new prisons. Rep. Parker Moore responded by saying one of the new prisons (Elmore County) will have a mental health treatment wing. The other prison will not. He also said they are looking at having a long-term mental health care facility in both north and south Alabama (165 beds in each). He said they are looking at funding for the long-term facilities to make them sustainable. Mack said that is exactly what we have been working on and he is glad they are working on that.

An individual told of their experience with the long-term mental health facilities in Florida. She felt that one of the assets they had was a court located in their facilities. There was a probate judge that came to the mental health facilities every week for one day and that was a big help.

Holly mentioned that there isn't a mental health model in any of the United States and she challenged Alabama to become that model of care for mental health.

4. Recap and Adjournment - Daniel Adamek

Daniel thanked the policy makers and public officials for coming today. This coalition has been meeting for 12 years and making incremental progress.

Everything discussed today will be on the website (www.northalabamamentalhealthcoalition.org). He asked the legislators to be in touch with him and have a dialog about mental health.

Mack said it is time to do something about this. This is in the interest of the mentally ill, but also a public safety issue. Too often the burden falls on the family.

Next Meeting
Tuesday May 12, 2026
11:00 am at Wellstone