



SEN. CRAIG V. HICKMAN, SENATE CHAIR
REP. ANNE-MARIE MASTRACCIO, HOUSE CHAIR

MEMBERS:

SEN. MIKE TIPPING
SEN. JILL C. DUSON
SEN. JEFF TIMBERLAKE
SEN. RICK BENNETT
SEN. BRADLEE T. FARRIN
REP. ANN HIGGINS MATLACK
REP. ADAM R. LEE
REP. MICHAEL H. LEMELIN
REP. CHAD R. PERKINS
REP. JOHN M. EDER

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE
GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

MEETING SUMMARY
April 11, 2025

Call to Order

The Chair, Senator Hickman, called the Government Oversight Committee to order at approximately 9:35 a.m.

ATTENDANCE

- Senators: Senator Hickman, Senator Bennett (attended via Zoom), Senator Duson, Sen. Farrin, Senator Tipping, and Senator Timberlake
- Representatives: Representative Mastraccio, Representative Eder, Rep. Lee, Representative Lemelin, Representative Matlack, and Representative Perkins
- Legislative Staff: Peter Schleck, Director, OPEGA
Kari Hojara, Senior Analyst, OPEGA
Jennifer Greiner, OPEGA Administrative Secretary/GOC Clerk
- Others: Rep. Margaret Craven
Benjamin Mann, Deputy Commissioner for Finance at DHHS
Brad Klawitter, Chief Executive Officer, Maine Veterans' Homes
Carolyn Dimek, Superintendent, Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center
Stephanie George-Roy, Superintendent, Riverview Psychiatric Center
Dr. Matthew Davis, Clinical Director, Riverview Psychiatric Center

Introduction of Committee Members

The members of the Committee introduced themselves.

New Business

(To watch this meeting - the recorded Live Stream can be viewed here: [April 11, 2025, GOC Meeting](#))

Meeting Summary – March 28, 2025

(A copy of this Meeting Summary can be found here: [March 28, 2025 GOC Meeting Summary](#))

The Committee accepted and approved this meeting summary.

Presentation of the Blue Ribbon Commission Study Report (DHHS)

Sen. Hickman invited Sen. Duson and Former Rep. Craven, Chairs of the 131st Blue Ribbon Commission to Study the Organization of and Service Delivery by Department of Health and Human Services, to present an overview of the Study to the Committee.

That study may be found here: [131st Blue Ribbon Commission to Study the Organization of and Service Delivery by DHHS](#)

Sen. Duson and Rep. Craven presented the overview, including that the Commission developed 25 recommendations for DHHS as a result of this study, one of which was to adopt the 30 recommendations of the GOC's Report on "Frontline Perspectives in Child Protection as Catalysts for Reform".

Rep. Mastraccio asked Sen. Duson and Rep. Craven if they were surprised by any of the findings of the Commission.

Rep. Craven stated that as she had sat on the Health and Human Services Committee she was not surprised by the Commission's findings, however she stated she is concerned with the findings particularly with services for elder care and for people with intellectual disabilities, noting a lot of those services are provided outside of DHHS and those providers experience lack of staffing and lack of adequate reimbursement.

Sen. Duson added that the Department consistently participated in the work of the Commission and updated the Commission on areas of internal improvement. Sen. Duson stated she is confident the Department will continue to update this Committee as well as the HHS Committee on their internal improvement work.

Sen. Hickman asked how much time the Commission spent discussing the GOC Report on "Frontline Perspectives in Child Protection as Catalysts for Reform." That Report may be found here: [Report of the Government Oversight Committee 131st Legislature: Frontline Perspectives in Child Protection as Catalysts for Reform](#)

Sen. Duson stated much of the first meeting of the Commission was spent on discussing the GOC recommendations.

Rep. Craven stated the Commission did vote on whether they would include all the GOC recommendations, adding the vote was unanimous of those voting to include all the recommendations.

Rep. Perkins asked for more information regarding the section of the report under Complex Cases, asking if that involved children staying in the ER due to no where else to place them.

Rep. Craven stated that Complex Cases is when a child has physical, developmental and or other high needs. Rep. Craven added the Commission did talk about children with behavioral needs stuck in hospitals awaiting placement.

Rep. Perkins asked what barriers or roadblocks could be removed that prevent children from being placed in the future.

Rep. Craven stated the biggest barrier is no place to refer the children to adding some children are being served out of State due to lack of placements, which means the children are away from families and support systems.

Sen. Duson stated one of the specific recommendations made by the Commission is that the Department should designate a person within the Commissioner's office with sufficient decision-making authority to coordinate services among the Department's offices to solve these complex cases to develop individualized plans of care.

Sen. Timberlake asked what has the Commission requested, if any, for follow up from the Department on the recommendations made by the Commission.

Sen. Duson stated that the Commission is very aware of the work being done by the Committee of Jurisdiction, the HHS Committee, as well as the GOC and its jurisdiction over relevant matters brought before them, adding the Commission did not have the power to recommend legislation. Sen. Duson added that the Commission is aware the Department has a regular reporting process to the HHS Committee, and it is the Commission's expectation that the HHS Committee will follow up on these recommendations, and the Commission will remain engaged with the HHS Committee to make sure that is happening.

Sen. Timberlake stated to the Chair that he is wondering how the Committee will use this Commission Report to help improve the Department.

Rep. Mastraccio stated the Department is meeting with HHS Committee every-other week to provide regular updates, with detail information on the recommendations that have been made to them and what they are doing based on those recommendations.

Sen. Duson added that with two committees of jurisdiction, the HHS Committee and this Committee, the goal of the Commission was the report, not creating a third body for the Department to respond to.

Sen. Farrin stated, noting he had been on previous Blue Ribbon Commissions for other topics, that the Commission is only as good as the follow-up of the report by the committees of jurisdiction.

Sen. Duson thanked the Department, some who were present at the meeting, for their participation in the work of the Commission.

Maine Veterans' Homes - Select Financial Operations

Sen. Hickman next invited Representatives of the Executive Branch to discuss with the Committee any payments to MVH already authorized but which remain pending. The office of the Chief Executive did not send a representative to the meeting. The letters sent inviting a representative from the Chief Executive and one or more representatives of DHHS to the GOC Meeting may be found here:

[GOC Letter to Chief Executive](#)
[GOC Letter to DHHS Commissioner](#)

Benjamin Mann, Deputy Commissioner of Finance at the Department of Health and Human Services, read his statement into the record. Mr. Mann's statement may be found here: [DHHS Deputy Commissioner for Finance Statements to GOC RE: Payments to MVH](#)

In his statement, Mr. Mann stressed that the final payment to MVH is not late, adding PL 2023, Ch. 643 which amended LD 985, required the payment to be made in FY2025, and the Department is on track to make that payment in the coming weeks.

Sen. Farrin asked Mr. Mann, regarding the \$1.86 million payment, to keep the Committee apprised of when that payment is going to be made.

Mr. Mann stated he would be happy to keep the Committee updated on the status of the payment.

Sen. Hickman asked Mr. Mann if there would be any shortfall from what MVH expected to receive.

Mr. Mann referred to the information provided to the Committee from MVH regarding payments outstanding stating there is a small discrepancy of a couple hundred-thousand dollars. That information may be found here: [MVH Memo to OPEGA RE: Appropriated Funding](#)

Mr. Mann stated he spoke with the CFO of MVH to walk him through the calculations and explained the difference was due to a complicated projected tax revenue that has changed, adding that the Department is using all available State funding to make the payments.

Sen. Tipping asked Mr. Mann for his input on the apparent miscommunication as MVH stated the funds outstanding are late while Mr. Mann stated they are not late, asking Mr. Mann how the Department is communicating with MVH about the timing of payments.

Mr. Mann stated that LD 985 and Resolve 117 specified the payment to be made in FY2025, adding the payment is planned to be paid before the end of the fiscal year. Mr. Mann added that he believes he has a fairly good relationship with MVH and admitted that communication could happen a bit more so both entities are on the same page.

Rep. Perkins asked Mr. Mann to explain the difference in the federal match rate from when LD985 passed to present day.

Mr. Mann stated the federal Medicaid assistance percentage has gone down in consecutive years, adding when LD 985 passed the federal match rate was a little more than 63% and the current federal match rate is right around 62%.

Sen. Hickman asked Mr. Mann when LD 985 was passed, there was an assumption of some payment coming from a service provider tax which has now been repealed and could Mr. Mann explain what the service provider tax was.

Mr. Mann stated on Jan. 1, 2025, the service provider tax, which among other services at MaineCare applied to residential care facilities was repealed so that tax does not exist any longer, meaning the projected revenue that would have been received from that tax does not exist and is another reason why the allocation provided under LD 985 is slightly overstated.

Sen. Hickman asked Mr. Mann how the service provider tax was repealed.

Mr. Mann stated the service provider tax was a dedicated MaineCare revenue source and the change was made in the FY2024-2025 biennial budget, adding the service provider tax has mostly been replaced with general funds.

Rep. Mastraccio stated the service provider tax was repealed during the 131st Legislature.

Rep. Matlack stated she was on the Tax Committee when that committee discussed the service provider tax adding it was around for a while and a way for the State to draw down federal matching funds, stating the federal government did not approve of the way that was happening, therefore the Tax Committee removed the service provider tax.

Sen. Hickman invited Mr. Klawitter, Chief Executive Officer of Maine Veterans' Homes, to come forward to either corroborate or add any further statements to the Committee regarding the information received by Mr. Mann.

Mr. Klawitter stated that he agrees with Mr. Mann's statements regarding outstanding payments to MVH, and other than the small discrepancy of a couple hundred-thousand dollars, MVH should be okay with the payments, if those funds are received by June 30, 2025.

Public Hearing on OPEGA Report

Sen. Hickman next opened the Public Hearing on the OPEGA Report: Maine Veterans' Homes – Select Financial Operations at approximately 10:18am.

This report may be found here: [Maine Veterans' Homes – Select Financial Operations](#)

Seeing no one step forward to provide public comment, Sen. Hickman closed the Public Hearing.

DHHS Payments for Foster Children in Day Care

Sen. Hickman next turned to the planned initial discussion with DHHS concerning the timeliness of payments for foster children in Day Care. Sen. Hickman stated that due to a scheduling conflict for the designated agency representative, OCFS Director Johnson, this discussion will be held at the next or a future Committee Meeting.

Sen. Hickman noted that this matter was recently added to the OPEGA Work Plan, and the Committee would hear from Director Schleck later in the meeting regarding the proposed scope of work and timing for this matter.

Riverview and Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Centers – Staffing and Staff Safety

Sen. Hickman next invited OPEGA Director Peter Schleck and OPEGA Senior Analyst Kari Hojara to provide a refresher briefing on Prior Information Gathering on Dorothea Dix and Riverview Staff, Safety, and Other Topics previously presented to the Committee on February 14, 2025.

Ms. Hojara presented the brief overview based on the prior presentation: [Review of Information Gathered for the GOC on Dorothea Dix and Riverview](#)

Rep. Perkins asked Ms. Hojara for the average number of patients per facility.

Ms. Hojara stated she would refer that question to the representatives from the facilities present for today's meeting.

Sen. Hickman next invited DHHS and Facility Representatives to come forward to take the Committee's questions.

Carolyn Dimek, Superintendent for Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center, and Stephanie George-Roy, Superintendent for Riverview Psychiatric Center, introduced themselves to the Committee.

Rep. Mastraccio asked Ms. Dimek and Ms. George-Roy, to discuss the difference in the number of injuries reported between Riverview and Dorothea Dix, as well as the difference in staff retention

rates between the facilities in the information OPEGA had gathered, and what their thoughts are on the reason for these differences.

Ms. George-Roy acknowledged there is a difference in the numbers of staff injuries and staff retention between the facilities. Ms. George-Roy stated Riverview has two SCU units, Special Care Units, which are for patients who present with highly acute behaviors, whereas Dorothea Dix does not have these units. The SCU units allow Riverview to take the people with the most acute referrals. Ms. George-Roy added that there is a referral system between the two hospitals where they communicate about the patients being presented to the facilities to determine the best fit for each person.

Ms. George-Roy also stated Riverview has a higher census than Dorothea Dix, noting Riverview has a total of 92 beds and Dorothea Dix has a total of 67 beds.

Ms. Dimek stated she agreed with Ms. George-Roy's statements regarding patient population and the referral process between the facilities.

Rep. Mastraccio asked if all the beds at the facilities are utilized.

Ms. Dimek stated at the present time Dorothea Dix has a census of 56 patients, noting they can take up to 67.

Ms. George-Roy stated the current census at Riverview is 72, noting they can take up to 92.

Sen. Hickman asked Ms. Dimek and Ms. George-Roy to explain why staff injuries data the Department provided to OPEGA in December 2024 and the Departmental Data presented to the HHS Committee in October 2023 do not match for the year 2022.

Ms. George-Roy stated the data pull for OPEGA vs the data pull for the HHS Committee were different data pulls with different parameters, stating the data pull for OPEGA was more comprehensive which included all incidences whereas the data pull for the HHS Committee was for actual injuries.

Rep. Perkins asked if the injuries at Riverview were primarily from patients in the SCU units.

Ms. George-Roy stated Riverview's SCU units each contain six beds for a total of 12 beds, adding that patients who meet a certain level of dangerousness or acuity start in one of these units while the staff assess how to safely move them to a main unit as they get better. Ms. George-Roy stated staff injuries can occur at any time due to the nature of all the patients in care, and can become unstable in any unit.

Rep. Perkins stated the Committee has been informed many of the staff injuries are caused by a very small percentage of the patient population asking if this was true.

Ms. George-Roy agreed it is a small percentage of patients who cause many of the staff injuries.

Sen. Tipping stated that in the OPEGA Staff Survey, the staff have real concerns about safety and communication with management, as well as a significant percentage of staff feeling management did not take this concern seriously. Sen. Tipping asked Ms. Dimek and Ms. George-Roy if since receiving the results of the OPEGA Survey, have they taken any steps to address these issues.

Ms. Dimek stated that at Dorothea Dix, leadership staff does rounds with every department throughout the hospital twice a year, where they talk about staff concerns regarding any process improvement, any safety issues to staff or patients, or any other concerns. Ms. Dimek noted it takes about three months to get to every department. Ms. Dimek added they have reports with all departments in the mornings, as well as having an open-door policy.

Sen. Tipping stated he appreciates the policies in place, however the results of the OPEGA Survey were particularly concerning and have any changes been made to address those concerns, stating the results of the survey show what is currently being done at the centers is not working.

Ms. George-Roy stated she believes the policies they have in place to address staff concerns are working. Ms. George Roy added Riverview did take the feedback from the OPEGA survey and as a result of the survey, has started learning sessions in each of the units at the facility, having performed 10 of them since they received the results of the survey with more scheduled. Ms. George-Roy also stated they have met with all direct care staff, as well as some departments specifically in response to the survey results. Ms. George-Roy stated, in addition to doing the same policies as Dorothea Dix, Riverview also has a BERT team, a Behavioral Emergency Response Team, to respond to all crises at the facility as well as psychiatric and medical response teams, who are debriefed with members of the executive committee. Ms. George-Roy added briefings on patients with staff happen twice a day, in the morning and at the evening staff change.

Sen. Tipping stated he appreciates the steps Riverview leadership has taken. Sen. Tipping asked if any changes in employee compensation have been made or any other retention efforts, stating a lot of the staff concerns stem from lack of staff.

Ms. George-Roy stated she has no control over staff compensation. Ms. George-Roy also stated that within the standards that they operate, they have not had staffing deficits, adding staffing ratios have been supplemented with contract staff, allowing the facility to maintain staffing levels required. Ms. George-Roy stated staff recruitment and retention efforts are ongoing., including job fairs, having nursing students from three schools rotate through the facility, staff recruiting from closing facilities, as well as “stay” interviews for retention.

Ms. Dimek stated at Dorothea Dix has been successful with staff recruitment and retention, adding they have six RN vacancies currently, with two of those positions filled. Ms. Dimek stated Dorothea Dix has four mental health worker vacancies currently with three of those positions filled.

Sen. Hickman asked for the stay interview process to be explained to the Committee.

Ms. George-Roy stated the unit managers, nurse managers and assistant nurse managers with the nursing directors, will do stay interviews with current staff, asking questions like; how are things going, what do you think should be improved, why do you stay working at Riverview, are you

thinking about leaving Riverview, what would you like management to know that could be different, what ideas do you have for improving the environment, what are things you think are being done well. Ms. George-Roy also stated that exit interviews by HR are done when staff leave Riverview and provides feedback to the leadership.

Rep. Eder stated one of the glaring issues from the OPEGA survey results was the question of whether or not those that responded felt like management is committed to retaining staff in the facility, adding he has worked in a direct support role for many years. Rep. Eder asked Ms. Dimek and Ms. George-Roy if they had any thoughts as to why some staff would believe management is not committed to retaining staff.

Ms. George-Roy stated that reason why they did the listening sessions was in response to the OPEGA survey, and to listen to staff discuss some of the concerns raised in the survey. Ms. George-Roy stated the issue of management being committed to retaining staff was not a central theme during the listening sessions they have conducted. Ms. George-Roy stated that what was part of the listening sessions was about how all staff communicate with each other and the desire to advance that communication in a positive way.

Rep. Eder asked Ms. George-Roy if she found staff forthcoming during the listening sessions, and if there is something about the culture that might make staff feel they cannot be forthcoming.

Ms. George-Roy stated she believes the feedback received during the listening sessions was very forthcoming as well as staff speaking their mind during open-office hours, during huddles, labor management meetings, town halls and stay interviews.

Rep. Eder asked Ms. George-Roy if Riverview has instituted any sort of aftercare or selfcare programs.

Ms. George-Roy stated after every incident that occurs at Riverview there is a debriefing. Ms. George-Roy also stated that in response to the OPEGA survey, where staff did not feel debriefings were consistent after an incident, they have instituted a new position for called Lead Debriefer, which is a mental health worker leader who is assigned specifically to record what is happening and makes sure all staff are debriefed after incidents.

Sen. Hickman asked for more information regarding staff investigations or staff discipline, and what kinds of staff investigations or discipline might keep staff from being able to express their concerns in an honest way.

Ms. George-Roy stated any staff member might be investigated for an allegation of abuse or neglect. Ms. George-Roy added a staff member may be investigated for an allegation of interacting poorly with a patient, either during an event or not, as well as any type of coworker issues which are reported to HR. Ms. George-Roy stated any type of abuse or neglect will be reported to Adult Protective Services and State licensing. Ms. George-Roy added any staff investigation has rules which must be followed as well as union representation for a staff member during any interview.

Sen. Hickman asked if, at either facility, they were aware of any staff who have been in a discipline or investigation situation who feel as though they were retaliated against by raising a concern to management.

Ms. Dimek stated she has not heard of any staff feeling retaliated against for raising concerns to management, adding when a staff member is being investigated or had an allegation that goes to HR, there is strict verbiage during the process that if the staff member feels retaliated against, to report that to HR or management.

Ms. George-Roy stated that she has also not heard of reports of staff who are under investigation or disciplined feeling like it was retaliation, adding that if it is a large investigation, that investigation will be conducted by either other members of HR or others outside the facility.

Rep. Perkins asked if the open-door policy was for all levels of staff, and how often that happens, and are there any barriers to the staff using this policy.

Ms. George-Roy and Ms. Dimek both stated the open-door policy is utilized every day. Ms. Dimek stated staff, besides physically going to their office, can also call and email concerns to management, or make appointments to discuss concerns in person.

Sen. Tipping stated that there does seem to be a disconnect as the Committee is being told by Ms. George-Roy and Ms. Dimek they have never heard of a concern of retaliation, however the data from the OPEGA survey shows these concerns. Sen. Tipping added the Labor Committee, of which he is Chair, had a hearing on the special retirement plan and there was testimony on mic from care workers stating they feared retaliation. Sen. Tipping also stated he received communication from other care workers who did not testify at that hearing due to fearing retaliation. Sen. Tipping asked why there is such a disconnect.

Ms. George-Roy stated she is aware of some staff that feel the way Sen. Tipping described, however she stated they are providing all the opportunities for staff to voice concerns adding that the data Sen. Tipping referred to is a survey, which are feelings and opinions. Ms. George-Roy stated she is not sure what the disconnect between staff and management is and she does not know what the answer is for the staff that feel the way Sen. Tipping described, and suggested leadership needs more feedback from the staff to discover what the disconnect is and what would be retaliatory to them. Ms. George-Roy stated she wants staff to speak freely, and would like to know if staff feel they cannot speak freely.

Rep. Mastraccio asked for clarification on what is a Joint Commission visit.

Ms. Dimek stated the Joint Commission is an organization that comes to the facility and surveys/audits the hospital to make sure all the CMS standards are being met. CMS is the federal agency that provides health coverage through Medicare and Medicaid.

Rep. Mastraccio asked if a report was produced and how often CMS audits happen.

Ms. George-Roy stated a report is produced by the CMS audit, and is performed every three years.

Rep. Mastraccio asked when the CMS audit report comes back to the facility.

Ms. Dimek stated the CMS audit report is not a report on findings, but concerns the process of the facility being licensed.

Ms. George-Roy stated Riverview's window for their CMS audit is from now till August. Ms. George-Roy added feedback does get shared with the facility and if issues are found they have a window of time to present a plan of correction to the Joint Commission for any citations given to the facility.

Ms. George-Roy stated during the CMS audit, staff and patients are interviewed about safety.

Rep. Mastraccio asked if the interviews performed by CMS are confidential.

Ms. Dimek and Ms. George-Roy both stated the interviews performed by CMS are confidential.

Rep. Lemelin asked for clarification regarding the difference in the number of staff injuries at Riverview where in 2023 they had 27 injuries reported, and 2024 had 60 injuries reported.

Ms. George-Roy stated Riverview had a particular patient in 2024 who had 14 or 16 spitting incidences, and a spitting is considered an assault. Ms. George-Roy added the number of injuries does fluctuate depending on patient acuity, adding there are different levels of assaults.

Dr. Matthew Davis, Clinical Director at Riverview Psychiatric Center, joined the conversation, adding the patient population was higher in 2024 than it was in 2023, and there was one particular patient at Riverview who accounted for more than 50% of the assaults in the hospital in FY2024 and about 75% of the assaults in the hospital for FY2025.

Rep. Mastraccio asked for clarification on the OPEGA survey results which noted some staff feel they are adequately trained and feel safe, but believe other staff are not adequately trained, and is there a difference between contracted nursing staff vs. the regular staff.

Ms. Dimek stated the contract staff at Dorothea Dix have been there for many years and work well with the staff.

Ms. George-Roy stated that Riverview's contract staff are trained the same way as regular staff are trained, adding there are currently 13 contract nurses at Riverview, adding that contract staff at Riverview often renew their contracts to continue working at Riverview.

Rep. Mastraccio asked if there was an anonymous way for staff to communicate any concerns to leadership.

Ms. George-Roy stated Riverview has safety and suggestion boxes throughout the hospital.

Rep. Mastraccio asked if there was an alert system where staff wear something to alert all staff of an issue.

Ms. George-Roy stated they do have an alert system for psychiatric emergencies and code blue, where staff wear an assigned numbered button and if that button is pressed an alert goes out by phone, email and radio which provides the information of who and where the issue is.

Rep. Eder suggested the facilities use regular surveys to staff as recommendation from the results of the OPEGA Survey, to see if the changes they are making show improvement in staff concerns.

Ms. Dimek stated they do send out a yearly safety survey, but will now incorporate some questions to narrow down what safety means to staff, hoping for more feedback so they can address those concerns.

Ms. George-Roy stated Riverview is also, in response to the listening sessions, going to form Process Improvement Committees to address concerns raised in the listening sessions.

Dr. Davis stated that when Riverview lost its CMS certification in 2013, one of the major deficiencies was around quality improvement which resulted in a focus of improving their quality assurance, including interacting with and receiving feedback from staff and making changes.

Sen. Hickman asked, in relation to staff feeling or fearing retaliation, are there some personalities of staff that are a "Nurse Ratchet" type, or someone staff is afraid of.

Ms. George-Roy stated there are 398 people on staff at Riverview, with a lot of passionate people, and there are always going to be different personality types in the staff, as well as different personality types of patients, and agrees there could be some staff who are afraid to speak out due to this.

Sen. Hickman asked Ms. George-Roy and Ms. Dimek what they would like to say to any employees who are listening who are fearful of retaliation.

Ms. Dimek stated she would encourage any employee to come forward with concerns, adding they do not tolerate retaliation at Dorothea Dix. Ms. Dimek stated staff can also speak with their HR rep about concerns.

Ms. George-Roy stated that perception does matter, and is sad to hear there are staff who feel they could not speak to legislatures as constituents, or at a hearing for fear of retaliation. Ms. George-Roy stated she would encourage any staff who feel this way to put the fear aside and speak out.

Rep. Eder stated the word retaliation keeps coming up in the conversation, and asked what would retaliation look like.

Ms. George-Roy stated that she is not clear what staff feel retaliation would look like to them.

Rep. Eder asked what is the disciplinary regime in place.

Ms. George-Roy stated discipline is union guided, including the levels of discipline and how they are to be handled.

Rep. Eder asked if there was a measurement or tracking of the number of disciplinary actions.

Ms. George-Roy stated HR and the union would have the information of disciplinary actions.

Sen. Hickman stated more than half of the respondents of the OPEGA survey did feel some level of disconnect and perceived retaliation, intimidation and a culture of fear, especially at Riverview. Sen. Hickman added he is happy Ms. Dimek, Ms. George-Roy, and Dr. Davis have put into the record, at least from their perspective, that any staff who feel this way has an avenue to express their concerns.

Ms. George-Roy stated she is a problem solver, and a caring professional, and wants feedback from those who have concerns to have an open conversation about where and why there is a disconnect to make some potential changes in addition to filtering that with those who think the facility is currently going in the right direction.

Sen. Tipping stated, according to the data from the OPEGA survey, there are only 3% of workers who always feel safe at work, 22% who agree that management is responsive to concerns, 30% who feel they can report safety concerns without negative consequences. Sen. Tipping stated he has also heard directly from care workers who did not feel they could respond to the OPEGA survey at all for fear of retaliation even though it was done by an outside entity. Sen. Tipping added these numbers show the extent of the problems, and some real issues that need to be addressed. Sen. Tipping asked if any follow-up had been done on the workers who expressed concerns during the Labor Committee hearing.

Ms. George-Roy stated they have the open-door policies, and asked Sen. Tipping to clarify if he was asking if they watched the Labor Committee hearing, read all the testimony and then met with those staff who testified during the hearing.

Sen. Tipping stated there have been many hearings before the HHS and Labor Committees where care workers have come forward and testified to the legislature their fear of retaliation and other concerns, asking Ms. George-Roy if she had met with those care workers.

Ms. George-Roy stated they have met with some of those workers, noting some who testified are members of the labor management team, adding some have gone to the open-door sessions and listening sessions, but she has not singled those workers out asking to speak with them regarding their testimony at the committees as she believes that would be seen as retaliatory, however she would like to hear from anyone on the workforce who has any concerns.

Rep. Mastraccio stated she appreciates the follow-up work that has been done by both of the facilities in response to the OPEGA survey, noting she believes it can be difficult to build trust in organizations, but it will take trust from both leadership and workers. Rep. Mastraccio added she appreciates all the different ways workers can submit their concerns to leadership and she would encourage all the staff to take advantage of the different ways to submit their concerns. Rep.

Mastraccio also suggested following up with a new survey in a year, going back to the same questions and see what the results are in the future, adding it takes time to develop the trust.

Ms. George-Roy stated she is proud that there are some staff that don't fear coming to her office and voicing concerns or disagreeing with something that was done, however she wants to support and reach the staff who don't feel they can approach leadership.

Sen. Hickman asked, regarding the care workers who testified before the HHS and Labor Committees with concerns, if there was a way for the leadership to identify if those workers were in a particular unit, or are they spread around, so that it might be possible to identify who those workers are afraid of.

Ms. George-Roy stated she believes the care workers who testified on a specific bill are a broad group from a small part of the workforce.

Sen. Hickman asked Ms. Dimek and Ms. George-Roy if there was anything further they would like the Committee to know.

Ms. Dimek stated they appreciate the OPEGA survey and are hoping those that do not feel they can bring up their concerns to leadership were able to respond to the survey and they will be using the results as a tool to improve.

Sen. Hickman asked if members of the Committee would like tours of the facility, would there be access to have direct conversations with workers to hear their concerns.

Ms. George-Roy stated the members of the Committee could absolutely have direct conversations with workers, adding this could be formally set up as a listening session for the Committee after the facility tour.

Sen. Tipping stated he was, at that moment, receiving emails from workers who were watching the meeting live, one worker writing that during their time at Dorothea Dix, HR has been resistant to a hospital only labor management committee, which could work directly with the administration on issues. Sen. Tipping asked Ms. Dimek if she would be willing to implement that.

Ms. Dimek stated she would be willing to implement a hospital only labor management committee.

Sen. Hickman asked if there were any limits to the number of people on a tour of the facility.

Dr. Davis stated historically tours have been done in groups of 3-5 people for different reasons, adding multiple tours could be done on the same day with groups going in different directions of the facility, or staggered throughout the day.

Sen. Hickman thanked Ms. Dimek, Ms. George-Roy, and Dr. Davis for coming before the Committee.

OPEGA Director's Report

Next, Sen. Hickman invited Director Schleck to present his Director's Report to the Committee.

Director Schleck presented a memo to the Committee on provisional scoping and order of priority of work for three GOC-assigned OPEGA reviews; Cannabis Conflict Concerns, Day Care Payments for Foster Children Timeliness, and Juniper Ridge, as well as two other matters for potential reviews which includes whether additional work is desired concerning Staffing and Staff Safety at Riverview and Dorothea Dix, and whether the Committee will assign OPEGA a review of the Home Energy Assistance Program.

Director Schleck's Memo can be found here: [Proposed Provisional Scoping and Order of Priority Submitted for Committee Votes](#)

Director Schleck stated OPEGA proposed to be working on at least two of these reviews at the same time with a mindfulness to move them to conclusion as soon as possible, and begin the third, but in an order of priority. Director Schleck also stated the proposed Provisional Scoping was carefully developed after listening to the Committee's concerns and discussions on these subjects.

Director Schleck began with the first item, Cannabis Conflict Concerns, stating the Office of Cannabis Policy has only been open since February of 2019, noting there have only been two directors in that office, therefore OPEGA proposed to look at the office since its inception. Director Schleck added anytime you hire someone for a particular role, they're going to bring a certain amount of expertise that might bring with that intersections with prior relationships in industry and that it is incumbent on someone in such a position to make sure they are following the conflict rules and how that is managed.

Director Schleck then discussed the second item, Timeliness of Payments by DHHS for Foster Children in Day Care. Director Schleck informed the Committee that on March 3rd, he wrote to the Commissioner of DHHS and asked for their standards, across the board, for timeliness of payments, adding just this week he received a response from Deputy Commissioner Bogart which states that DHHS not have program specific payment timelines (there are simply certain timelines for invoice payment).

Director Schleck next discussed the third item, Juniper Ridge, which is a contractor operated but state-owned facility, noting it is important to understand how is the state measuring this project in the best interests of the state, also noting OPEGA will touch on the contracting aspects, site expansion or consideration of alternative sites and environmental considerations.

Sen. Hickman thanked Director Schleck for being thorough in explaining what OPEGA is doing based on what was heard from the Committee.

Sen. Hickman asked the Committee if there were any objections, additional thoughts, or questions about the Director has framed the scope of work through the Proposed Provisional Scoping.

Rep. Mastraccio stated she appreciates how the Director worded the questions based on the Committee discussion and votes, and also agrees with the order of the reviews presented.

Motion and Committee Vote

Sen. Hickman asked if there was a motion to prioritize the reviews as listed on the Director's memo with the understanding that multiple reviews or differing combinations of reviews may be ongoing at any time.

The motion was moved by Sen. Timberlake and seconded by Rep. Perkins.

Sen. Tipping suggested, in regards to Juniper Ridge, that OPEGA also look into how contracting is done and written into legislation.

No objections were made to Sen. Tipping's amendment.

The motion was approved unanimously by all Committee Members.

Sen. Hickman asked the Committee for any discussion on the Home Energy Assistance Program, and Dorothea Dix and Riverview, asking the Committee if they wanted to take any action on these matters at this time.

At this time the Committee did not wish to take further action on the Home Energy Assistance Program, or Dorothea Dix and Riverview. The Committee will look into scheduling a tour of Riverview in the future.

Director Schleck next present a memo to the Committee which stated he has requested, as allowed by law, an advisory opinion from the Public Access Ombudsman regarding the Freedom of Access Act Request from a news organization for records concerning DHHS Payments to Foster Children in Day Care. Director Schleck stated the Public Access Ombudsman could come before the Committee to discuss this FOAA request and her opinion on this matter. That memo may be found here: [Advisory Opinion Request from the Public Access Ombudsman](#)

Director Schleck next mentioned future Committee meeting dates, noting that the meeting tentatively scheduled for May 23, 2025, happens to fall on the Friday before Memorial Day weekend, adding he does not have any scheduled plans specifically for that meeting at this time. Director Schleck also stated May 23rd happens to be the day after his oldest stepdaughter's college graduation in another state. Director Schleck asked the Committee if the May 23rd meeting could be potentially dispensed with.

Sen. Hickman asked the Committee if any member objected to not meeting on the Friday of Memorial Day Weekend. Seeing no objections, Sen. Hickman stated the Committee will remove the Friday, May 23rd meeting from the schedule, adding if there is an emergency that does come up, the Committee would of course reconsider.

Rep. Perkins asked if the Committee was committed to meeting on the third Wednesday of each month during the interim as opposed to another Wednesday, perhaps the second Wednesday.

Sen. Hickman stated the Committee was not committed to which Wednesday the Committee will meet, adding the Committee will discuss the interim scheduling as it gets closer to the end of session, however Rep. Perkins could make a proposal now.

Rep. Perkins stated he would like to propose the second Wednesday of each month as a meeting day during the interim due to outstanding commitment, and would like to have further discussion in the future.

Adjourn

Sen. Hickman adjourned the Government Oversight Committee, without objection, at approximately 11:52am