

Meeting Minutes:

Cultural and Ethnic Communities Leadership Council

Date: January 16, 2026

Minutes prepared by: DHS Community Relations Staff

Location: Webex and NorthPoint Health and Wellness Conference Center (Hybrid)

Attendance

- **CECLC Members:** Makram El-Amin, Shawn Sorrell, Chris Green, Philip Gaye-Bai, Farhia Said, Alex Abraha, Wayne Somes, Angela Fields, Abdi Ali-Mumin, Sonia Reyes, Shannon Geshick, Tonia Lofton, Nina Vongpheth, Lolita Davis Carter, Dr. Richard Oni, Chris Guy, Kiora Matthews, Paul Slack, Micaela Schuneman
- **State Agency Staff:** Helen Ghebre, Lola Muhammad, Sophia Mai, Deputy Commissioner John Connolly, Deputy Commissioner Nikki Farago, Hli Vang, Leigh Grauman, Shelly Diaz, Assistant Commissioner DeAnna Conover, Jewelly Lee, Shavana Talbert, Steven Wilson, Haile Tegegne,
- **Public Attendees:** Marissa Noe, Rose Say, Hodan Guled, Ky Allbritton, Mai Thor, Foua-Choua Khang, Bilikisu Banjoko LMFT, Col MacCrae

Agenda:

- 12:00 **Lunch & Community Networking / Webex Opens**
- 1:00 **Open Public Meeting and Land Acknowledgement/Statement from Co-Chairs**
- 1:05 **Introductions, Welcome & Check-in Activity [Breakout Sessions]**
 - Introduce new community members and guests
 - How have you lived one of the Guiding Principles this week?
 - Discuss Current Events
- 1:55 **Review and Approve Meeting Agenda and Minutes**
- 2:00 **Deputy Commissioner John Connolly: HR1 Federal Changes to Medicaid**
- 2:30 **Community Celebrations & Shout Outs**
- 2:40 **Break**
- 2:50 **Workgroup Updates & Priorities**
 - **Workgroup Co-Lead Seats**
 - **Legislative Workgroup**
 - Discuss Navigator Support Memo
 - Desired Outcome #3 w/ Topics & Issues
 - **Equitable Outcomes Workgroup**
 - Desired Outcome #1 (Introduction)

- **Topics and Issues Workgroup**
 - Desired Outcome #3 (ongoing)

4:00

Adjourn Full Council Meeting

Welcome, Land Acknowledgement, and Introductions

Alex Abraha called the meeting to order, and Shawn Sorrell read a land acknowledgement.

Abraha stated that recent federal government actions have brought grief, fear, anger and exhaustion to Minnesota communities, and the council's role is to hold space for truth, complexity and humanity without rushing to solutions or minimizing harm. Abraha asked council members to practice listening, compassion and respect.

Abraha led meeting participants in introductions and initiated breakout sessions.

Follow-up items from breakout sessions:

- Should the council issue a statement about the impact of federal government actions?
 - The council has not issued statements about previous events affecting communities.
- Can the council play a role in helping communities get the information they need right now?

Decisions Made

Review and approve December minutes and meeting agenda:

- Motion to approve meeting agenda and December minutes: Alex Abraha
- Second: Chris Guy
- The motion passed

Community Celebrations and Shoutouts

Alex Abraha opened the floor for members to share.

- Community March: Uniting Across Differences (January 18 1-4pm with check-in starting at 12:30pm.) from Saint Paul College to the Minnesota State Capitol, free tickets available on EventBrite
- Governor's Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration (January 19 10am-noon at the Ordway)
- 11th Annual Memorial March for Missing & Murdered Indigenous Relatives (February 14 11am-2pm at the Minneapolis American Indian Center)
- The Immigrant Defense Network is a growing Minnesota-based coalition of 90 grassroots nonprofit and advocacy groups who are developing a new rapid response strategy to train individuals at locations throughout the Twin Cities to become constitutional observers
- Monarca Rapid Response Line offers virtual and in-person upstander training sessions
- Native community organizations are leading community and response safety work in South Minneapolis and are accepting donations (donations for Many Shields can be brought to Pow Wow Grounds Café or All My Relations Art Gallery in Minneapolis)

- Metro Urban Indian Directors are holding emergency meetings to stay in tune with community needs.
- Council representatives joined a recent conversation hosted by DHS Employee Culture regarding equity work; the session included representatives of other councils and was productive
- It's difficult for many communities to celebrate when they feel threatened by federal government actions; restorative practices and resources are urgently needed

Administrative Update

Deputy Commissioner John Connolly gave a presentation on program integrity measures and the impact and implementation of the federal government's recent reconciliation bill (HR1).

Program integrity:

- In September 2025, Governor Tim Walz issued Executive Order 25-10, which directs all state agencies to strengthen fraud prevention and detection efforts.
- The federal government stated that some federal funding to MN will be withheld due to fraud concerns.
 - DHS is appealing this decision; the reduction may hinder ongoing fraud prevention efforts.
- DHS created a corrective action plan to address fraud prevention in DHS programs and is in communication with the federal government regarding building upon and expanding this action plan.
 - DHS identified 14 programs as high-risk, including the closed housing support program.
 - A significant area of focus is DHS program integrity in Medicaid; resources are being redirected from other state agencies to support this work.
- DHS is evaluating options for centralizing within DHS certain eligibility and enrollment functions to create process improvements for some functions which are managed by counties; counties have also experienced resource constraints in serving populations.
 - Legislative support and funding for system modernization will be needed.
- Programs must be designed from the start with program integrity measures and resources.
- DHS is working to increase coordination across the agency and make sure everyone feels responsible for program integrity and being good stewards of public funds.
- DHS implemented an enhanced prepayment review process for providers to identify any concerns before payment is issued; if no concerns are identified, payment is released within two weeks.
 - Some providers under DHS programs have experienced interruptions in payments due to this process; DHS has begun releasing payments to providers with no identified concerns.
 - Some of the criteria and methods being used to identify higher risk providers cannot be shared publicly in order to ensure this information is not used by people seeking to commit fraud.
 - CECLC members shared that some smaller providers' operations have been significantly impacted by delayed payments.
- DHS will continue to engage with MN communities and health care providers and advocate to enhance and improve access to assistance and services.
 - It is also important to communicate to people who do not access these services how important they are to their fellow Minnesotans and to the financial stability of health care providers.

- CECLC members stated the importance of improving communication to all Minnesotans about how to obtain services, including providing support to people without technical knowledge or access.
 - DHS would welcome feedback from CECLC members on how to bridge the technical divide and identify additional ways for people to access services.
- Additional information is available through the DHS program integrity webpage: <https://mn.gov/dhs/program-integrity>

HR1:

- Medical Assistance is the largest source of coverage in Minnesota, covering more than 1.2 million Minnesotans including more than 600,000 children (around 40% of children in MN).
- Medical Assistance finances preventive care, chronic disease management, and around half of all long-term care services in MN.
- MN is required to comply with all requirements of HR1 in order to maintain access to federal funding.
- DHS guiding principles for Medicaid:
 - Maintain coverage for eligible enrollees
 - Comply with federal and state requirements
 - Minimize burden on workforce
 - Simplify process and align where possible
 - Robust communications with impacted communities
 - Uphold fiscal responsibility
- HR1 introduced several eligibility and coverage changes:
 - As of October 1, 2026, adults who are at least 21 years old, not pregnant, and not United States citizens will no longer be eligible for coverage unless they are lawful permanent residents, Cuban or Haitian entrants, or Compact of Free Association (COFA) migrants.
 - DHS will begin communicating changes to affected individuals in this group in June 2026.
 - The period of retroactive coverage is reduced from three months to one month for individuals who were eligible for coverage but not enrolled at a time when they were treated.
 - There are new reporting requirements for the adult expansion group (adults aged 21-65 with no children living with them):
 - Beginning January 1, 2027, states must conduct eligibility redeterminations every six months for adult expansion enrollees who are not American Indian / Alaska Natives.
 - Adult expansion enrollees must meet a new work reporting / community engagement requirement to qualify for medical assistance.
 - Applicants need to meet an exception or complete a qualifying activity in the month prior to application.
 - Enrollees must meet an exception or complete a qualifying activity in one of the six months prior to their renewal.
 - DHS will begin communicating changes to affected individuals in this group in June 2026.
- Under HR1, Planned Parenthood is no longer a qualified provider for individuals using medical assistance coverage, and providers will receive lower payments for services.
- Additional resources are available: <https://mn.gov/dhs/federalchanges/tools-for-partners>

Workgroup Updates

Legislative and Policy Workgroup

- There are openings for a member and an interim co-leader of this work group.
- Work group members can choose to focus on different topics depending on their individual priorities.
- CECLC members were asked to review language around desired outcomes, which was developed during the September CECLC retreat; the language was finalized, but members are invited to propose changes or additional goals and outcomes on an ongoing basis.
- All CECLC members are invited to join work group meetings.
- The legislative workgroup helps identify legislative priorities for the CECLC, collaboratively works with the DHS legislative team and other CECLC members to move those priorities forward, and evaluates and tracks bills as they move through the legislative process.
- There are outstanding questions around how the CECLC can contribute to DHS policy discussions, whether through direct conversations with DHS leadership or through Helen Ghebre as a liaison.
- DHS should consider reimbursing CECLC members for their time as they engage in these efforts.
- During the September retreat, the CECLC identified several 30-, 60- and 90-day tasks, some of which are already in motion or completed (a subcommittee of work group members is tracking and project managing these tasks).
- The first desired outcome is for DHS to establish an equitable accountability system, and it will be necessary to identify measurements.
 - One accountability measure may be how CECLC can engage with DHS around process improvements, through invitations to direct engagement with leadership, community engagement and visibility or other actions.
- The second desired outcome is focused on funding, and increasing equity analysis across DHS to ensure equitable funding distribution for marginalized communities, with the goal of improving equity based funding allocation by 25%.
 - Another potential measurement of this outcome could be around maintaining access and funding for community-based providers.
 - The CECLC will continue to connect with DHS equity directors about DHS accountability to achieve these goals.
 - Equity directors are responsible for informing the CECLC about equity-based discussions and budget decisions in their areas and providing updates on CECLC advocacy items.
- The third desired outcome is around outreach and states: “DHS must expand targeted, linguistically appropriate, and culturally relevant community outreach and education efforts to improve program awareness, eligibility understanding, and responsiveness to policy changes.”
- The legislative and policy workgroup will support the CECLC’s efforts to produce its required report to the legislature every two years.

- The workgroup will establish goals by the end of February and will plan to finalize measurable results by the end of March.
- The next MN legislative session begins February 17, 2026.
 - This year's session will be a policy and bonding year, not a budget year; the CECLC has another year to finalize budget goals based on metrics to advocate for with the legislature.
 - This work needs to be tracked and moved forward through working sessions and efforts by staff and CECLC members outside of the regular CECLC meeting schedule.

Topics and Issues Workgroup

- There is an opening for a co-leader of this work group.

Equitable Outcomes Workgroup

- There is an opening for a co-leader of this work group.
 - Co-leaders are asked to help set the agenda for the work group, connect with other co-leaders and work group members, align with CECLC and co-leaders of other work groups, and help create plans to move the work forward throughout the year.
 - Some topics are set during the retreat and then assigned to a workgroup; others are developed by the workgroup.
- Each CECLC member should be an active member in at least one workgroup.
- CECLC members are strongly encouraged to attend the annual retreat to foster team-building and develop a deeper understanding and connection to the CECLC's work.

Meeting adjourned at 4:20 PM