

**HUMAN SERVICES
COMMITTEE MEETING
May 4, 2026**

Chairman Kennedy called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Kennedy, Councilor Thompson, and Councilor Ashline.

OTHERS PRESENT: Councilor Myer; Councilor FitzGibbons; Councilor Lautensack; Councilor Plunkett; Mayor, Robert Corradino; City Attorney, Kevin Caraccioli; Jeff McGann, Planning and Zoning Administrator; Craig Rebeor, Commissioner of Public Works and Parks and Recreation; Police Chief, Phillip Cady II; Police Sergeant, Brandon Lummis; Fire Chief, Paul Conzone.

MEDIA PRESENT: No media present.

OLD BUSINESS: There was no old business.

A motion to approve the minutes of the March 16, 2026, Committee Meeting was made by Councilor Ashline and seconded by Councilor Thompson. Minutes were approved unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS:

- 1. Police Chief, Phil Cady, requests authorization to enter into an agreement with Helio Health, Inc. for an embedded Mental Health Clinician and further authorization for the City Chamberlain to execute payment for monthly invoices related to same.**

Police Chief, Phil Cady, presented a request to continue the City's partnership with Helio Health Incorporated for an embedded mental health clinician program and authorize the City Chamberlain to pay monthly invoices for the service. Chief Cady explained that the program began in April 2024 after the City secured \$150,000 in grant funding from then-Senator Mannion and \$75,000 from the Shineman Foundation to address homelessness and mental health concerns. He stated that the program had expanded beyond homelessness response and now assists with mental health calls, domestic disputes, death notifications, juvenile matters, and other crisis situations. Chief Cady explained that the request would fund the program through the remainder of 2026 after grant funds were exhausted and estimated that approximately \$65,000 would cover the remaining costs. He added that future expansion could be discussed during 2027 budget deliberations.

Tania Lyons of Helio Health reviewed the program's impact, stating that in 2025 clinician Gina Vaughn responded to 225 immediate calls for service and managed 717 total client-related encounters, serving more than 300 individuals. Lyons noted that nearly half of the referrals originated from 911 dispatch and that the program facilitated 81 direct connections to mental health treatment, substance use care, housing assistance, and primary care services. She stated

that the embedded clinician model reduced strain on patrol officers, improved continuity of care, and helped prevent repeat crises, hospitalizations, and justice system involvement.

Councilor Kennedy asked whether Gina Vaughn handled all of the responses independently, and Lyons clarified that the 225 direct calls involved responses with law enforcement while the remaining contacts consisted primarily of follow-up services and referrals.

Councilor Myer stated that he had heard positive feedback about the program from Chief Cady and police officers and expressed support for continuing the program.

Councilor FitzGibbons praised the program's impact and stated that it helped reduce demands on first responders, the fire department, emergency rooms, and other public resources.

Lyons added that embedded clinician programs were becoming more common nationwide and expressed hope that the City could eventually add a second clinician because crises can occur at any time.

Chief Cady stated that Oswego's program was likely among the first of its kind in Central New York and emphasized that follow-up care was one of the program's most important components.

Councilor Kennedy commended Chief Cady's leadership and stated that mental health professionals provide expertise beyond standard police training.

Chief Cady explained that the City initially considered hiring a clinician directly but determined that partnering with Helio Health was more practical due to certification requirements and specialized experience.

Councilor Thompson asked whether the City would eventually require more than one clinician based on the volume of calls.

Chief Cady responded that two clinicians would likely provide sufficient coverage and stated that staffing could be evaluated further during budget discussions. Councilor Kennedy then asked whether additional grant opportunities were being pursued, and Chief Cady stated that discussions were underway with Oswego County regarding possible opioid settlement funding. He added that the City continued to pursue grant opportunities and credited Police Sergeant Brandon Lummis for helping secure grant funding and assisting in development of the program.

Councilor FitzGibbons also noted that Helio Health had identified opportunities for third-party reimbursement for some services, helping extend available funding. Lyons explained that reimbursement depended on obtaining consent from individuals receiving services, which can be difficult during crisis situations.

COMMITTEE DECISION: Councilor Ashline made a motion to close the discussion at the request of Councilor Kennedy. Councilor Kennedy seconded the motion, it was approved unanimously.

THE RESOLUTION THAT WAS PART OF THE MEETING WILL BE PREPARED AND FORWARDED TO THE FULL COUNCIL.

2. Chairman Chance Kennedy, requests discussion regarding Mental Health Awareness Month.

Councilor Kennedy opened a discussion regarding Mental Health Awareness Month and invited members of the public and local organizations to speak about mental health services, substance use treatment, and community needs within the City of Oswego and Oswego County.

Aaron Stark introduced himself as an admitting clinician for Farnham Family Services, explaining that his primary responsibility is assessing individuals seeking treatment for substance use disorders and mental health concerns. He discussed the strong connection between mental health and substance use disorder, noting that the American Psychiatric Association classifies substance use disorder as a chronic brain disease that is treatable and not simply a matter of willpower. Stark explained that many individuals either use substances to self-medicate untreated mental health symptoms or develop mental health conditions as a result of prolonged substance use. He also shared that Farnham Family Services is preparing to move into its new George Street location, expected to open in late July or early August, with transportation partnerships arranged to improve access to services.

A representative from Oswego County Opportunities outlined the agency's behavioral health services, including mental health services, residential housing, and supportive living programs for adults with severe mental illness. The representative described OCO's 10-bed supervised residence, transitional apartment treatment program with up to 30 beds, crisis respite bed, and supportive housing voucher program that assists individuals in securing independent housing while limiting rent costs to 30% of income. The representative also discussed substance use residential services at Arbor House in Hannibal, supportive living programs, and expanding congregate housing opportunities in Pulaski and Mexico.

Councilor Kennedy asked how individuals can access services.

The representative explained that referrals can be made through OCO's main number and applications are available. The representative also focused on supportive housing models and the need for emergency supportive housing options within the community.

Councilor FitzGibbons discussed the importance of emergency supportive housing and identified it as a significant gap in the community's mental health support system. He encouraged OCO to explore potential emergency housing models and return with ideas for how such services could be implemented locally, emphasizing the importance of community partnerships and planning to address homelessness and housing instability for individuals experiencing mental health crises.

Councilor Kennedy stated that the purpose of the discussion was to begin identifying solutions to local mental health and housing issues, including concerns related to Haven of Hope and broader community needs. He acknowledged that solutions would take time but emphasized the importance of making progress through collaborative efforts between the city, county, and

service organizations.

Clark Sargeant, Executive Director of Mental Health and Wellness for Oswego Health, thanked the council for bringing attention to mental health issues and discussed the importance of community partnerships. He noted that Oswego Health observed a reduction of approximately 300 inpatient admission days over the past year, partially attributing the improvement to partnerships such as the Helio Health overdose diversion program. Sargeant explained that Oswego County has one of the highest suicide rates among surrounding counties, making mental health and suicide prevention a critical concern. Sargeant outlined Oswego Health's four primary service lines: inpatient psychiatric services, outpatient mental health services, the Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) program, and school-based mental health services. He announced that Oswego Health is preparing to launch a pilot program allowing certain individuals to be admitted directly to inpatient psychiatric care through the Lobdell Center without first going through the emergency room. He also described the ACT team's work delivering psychiatric and support services directly within the community for individuals unable to access centralized care. Sargeant emphasized the success of school-based mental health services, explaining that therapists are currently placed in many schools throughout Oswego County, including schools in the City of Oswego. He described a coordinated transition process between grade levels to ensure continuity of care for students receiving services. In response to questions from council members, he stated that the program supplements school counselors rather than replacing them and that schools incur no cost for participation.

Councilor Lautensack asked whether Oswego Health's school-based therapy program was operated directly through Oswego Health. After discussion about community partnerships, she also suggested the possibility of Oswego Health partnering with first responders to address mental health challenges faced by emergency personnel.

Fire Chief, Paul Conzone, commended the council for discussing mental health publicly and explained that mental health challenges significantly affect first responders. He stated that firefighters and police officers regularly encounter traumatic situations and stressed the importance of culturally competent clinicians who understand the experiences of first responders. Conzone discussed the city's Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which provides confidential counseling resources for employees through an outside vendor, but noted that additional support and proactive outreach may be necessary.

Councilor Ashline asked Fire Chief, Paul Conzone, to elaborate on the Employee Assistance Program available to city employees and how it operates.

Fire Chief, Paul Conzone, explained that the city's Employee Assistance Program is currently provided through Crouse Health and has been in place for many years. He stated that the program offers confidential and anonymous support services to city employees, with informational cards and posters distributed throughout city offices and included as part of new employee orientation. Conzone noted, however, that simply providing information is sometimes not enough and emphasized the importance of identifying and supporting individuals before they reach a crisis point. He stated that the city is working toward cultural changes surrounding mental health awareness among first responders and expressed appreciation for the strong local

mental health resources available within the community. He added that additional information about the EAP could be provided through the city's personnel office.

Responding to discussion about first responder mental health, Sargeant stated that Oswego Health would welcome opportunities to partner with local first responder agencies to improve access to mental health education and support services. He emphasized the importance of collaboration among organizations throughout the county.

Rachel Hendricks expressed appreciation for the city's willingness to hold public discussions regarding mental health. She noted that the community witnessed many cases of untreated mental illness during the winter months and stated that her organization was preparing to open by June 1. Hendricks explained that individuals in the community have been eager for a welcoming place where they can feel accepted, supported, and connected to resources, and she expressed excitement about partnering with other local agencies.

Councilor Myer thanked Councilor Kennedy for organizing the discussion and bringing greater attention to mental health issues within Oswego. He acknowledged that he had not previously realized the extent of mental health concerns in the community and expressed appreciation for the effort to bring awareness to the issue.

Councilor FitzGibbons reminded the public about the 988 crisis hotline, describing it as a confidential, free, 24-hour resource for individuals experiencing mental health, substance use, or emotional crises. He encouraged greater public awareness and use of judgment-free mental health resources.

Councilor Kennedy reiterated the importance of the 988 hotline as a resource for individuals experiencing crises and encouraged residents to utilize it if needed.

3. Chairman Chance Kennedy, requests an executive session to discuss proposed, pending or current litigation.

At the conclusion of the previous discussion, City Attorney, Kevin Caraccioli, advised the council regarding a request for executive session related to proposed, pending, or current litigation. He recommended that the council approve the request and defer entering executive session until the subsequent committee meeting so both topics could be addressed together.

COMMITTEE DECISION: Councilor Ashline made a motion to defer the request from Chairman Kennedy to enter Executive Session. Councilor Thompson seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made at 7:53 p.m. by Councilor Ashline. A second was made by Councilor Thompson, it was approved unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Egor Golubchikov

