

Dear Mental Health Task Force Members:

We are having our next Mental Health Task Force meeting on **Tuesday, November 14, 2017, at 1:00 p.m.** in the Press Room located on the 13th Floor of the Sillers Building. **Please mark your calendar! Please RSVP to tgord@ago.state.ms.us no later than November 8, 2017, if you are planning to attend the meeting.**

Members of the press have asked whether the Mental Health Task Force is going to be open to the media. We do not want to hinder open and honest discussion of our members, but we also want to ensure that the public is aware of our meaningful work on improving mental health in our state. Attorneys in our office advise that this task force is not considered a “public body,” as pursuant to Miss. Code. Ann. § 25-41-3 (West) thus it is not required to conduct open meetings. However, that does not mean we should meet exclusively, so we have provided a few options below for consideration and feedback.

We could decide to allow access for the media on the condition that they not report on the meeting, and only take quotes after the meeting from willing task force members. For members not in favor of making the meetings available to the media, we could, at some point, have a question and answer session with willing members, the public, and the media. We could also decide for the media not to have any access to Mental Health Task Force meetings but provide updates regarding the work of the task force to the media when warranted.

We would like your input to determine whether you would like for the meeting to be open to media or closed to media. We will make the decision based on the responses received by the majority of the members. **Please email your response—either 1, 2, or 3—to tgord@ago.state.ms.us.**

1. Yes, I am in favor of the media being granted access to the Mental Health Task Force meetings (on the condition that they do not report on the meeting, only take quotes after the meeting from members willing to be interviewed by the media.
2. No, I am not in favor of the media being granted access to the Mental Health Task Force meetings, but I would be willing to have a question and answer session with willing members, the media, and the public.
3. No, I do not want the media to have any access to the Mental Health Task Force Meetings, but I would support the Mental Health Task Force providing updates on the work of the task force as necessary.

Please come prepared with some ideas so we do not run out of discussion time. If you can send me ideas in advance, I would appreciate it. If you have any agenda items to add (including subcommittee discussions, questions about particular areas, or recurring issues you are seeing in your jurisdiction), please let me know so we can incorporate those items into the agenda. If there are other persons or organizations you think should be included on the task force, please email me the name of the person or organization prior to the meeting. We have attached a Membership Directory, please ensure that your name and contact information are correct. If your name or contact information is not listed in the directory, please send me an email with your contact information so that we can update the directory.

Should you have any questions, please contact us. Thank you for your participation in the Mental Health Task Force, and we look forward to seeing you at our next meeting.

Sincerely,

Paula Broome, Bureau Chief
Ta'Shia S. Gordon, Special Assistant Attorney General
Bureau of Victim Assistance
Office of the Mississippi Attorney General
P.O. Box 220
Jackson, MS 39205
(601) 359-3070 (o)
(601)359-9681 (f)
Email: tgord@ago.state.ms.us

Dear Mental Health Task Force Members:

It has come to our attention that the Clarion Ledger filed an ethics complaint with the Mississippi Ethics Commission on Thursday, December 7, 2017, alleging that the decision to close the Mental Health Task Force meetings to the public is in violation of the Open Meetings Act. Attorneys within our office advise that the task force is not considered a “public body,” as defined by Miss. Code. Ann. § 25-41-3 (West) and, therefore, is not subject to the Open Meetings Act.

As General Hood has expressed in previous meetings, he is not opposed to having the press attend the Mental Health Task Force meetings but wanted the decision left to the membership of the task force. As you know, a previous poll of the task force determined that the meetings would not be open. The vote in that poll was extremely close. In light of the addition of a number of new members and because the recent headlines may impact your decision now, General Hood would again like to seek your input regarding whether we should allow the media to attend the meetings. It is our goal to create a meeting atmosphere that is conducive to open discussion and debate while, at the same time, ensuring that the public is kept apprised of our meaningful work on improving mental health in our state—whether it be through after-meeting interviews by the media with willing task force members, through summaries of meeting activities provided directly to the media or opening the meetings to the media.

We encourage everyone to take a moment to weigh in on this issue ***before Friday, December 22, 2017***, by emailing one of the following responses to tgord@ago.state.ms.us or calling-in your response to Ta’Shia Gordon at 601-359-3070 or Paula Broome at 601-359-3004.

- 1. Yes, I am in favor of the media being granted access to the Mental Health Task Force meetings.**
- 2. No, I am not in favor of the media being granted access to the Mental Health Task Force meetings but will continue to participate on the task force whether or not the media is present.**
- 3. No, I am not in favor of the media being granted access to the Mental Health Task Force meetings and, due to the policy of my organization/agency, would be prohibited from participating in task force meetings where the media is present.**
- 4. No, I am not in favor of the media being granted access to the Mental Health Task Force meetings and would not continue as a task force member if access is granted to the media.**

If the vote determines that the meetings should remain closed, we will continue to provide the media with summaries of the meetings and, as always, any task force member is free to speak with the media at any time.

Thank you for your participation in the Mental Health Task Force, and we look forward to seeing you at our next meeting on **January 25, 2018**. Should you have any questions, please contact us.

Ta'Shia S. Gordon, Special Assistant Attorney General
Bureau of Victim Assistance
Office of the Mississippi Attorney General
P.O. Box 220
Jackson, MS 39205
(601) 359-3070 (o)
(601)359-9681 (f)
Email: tgord@ago.state.ms.us