

COMMITTEE FOR PUBLIC COUNSEL SERVICES

MINUTES OF MEETING

April 15, 2026

The monthly meeting of the Committee for Public Counsel Services was held via video conference on April 15, 2026, beginning at 4:35 p.m. Jennifer McKinnon, Chairperson, presiding.

MEMBERS PARTICIPATING: Messes. Alvarado, Ball, Chester, Conrad, Dillon, Hall, McKinnon, Petropoulos

Messrs. Apfel, Cinquegrana, Kennedy, Povich, Tennen, White

1. Minutes of March 11 & 18, 2026

The minutes of the March 11 & 18, 2026 meetings were approved as presented.

2. Monthly Financial Overview

Finance Director Karen Souza presented the Monthly Financial Overview Report. CPCS has spent approximately \$244M or 64% of its \$382M appropriation. CPCS projects FY26 expenditures of approximately \$392M, with a forecasted deficit of approximately \$10.3M remaining unchanged.

- The Administration/Operations 0321-1500 line is projected to expend approximately \$113M.
- The Private Counsel 0321-1510 line is projected to expend approximately \$241M. CPCS will continue to monitor its 1510 private counsel appropriation.
- The Court Cost/Experts 0321-1520 line projects a potential \$10.3M deficit. Available funding is approximately \$27.6M and estimated expected spending is \$38M. Supplemental funds to address the shortfall were included in the supplemental budget filed in January, and passed by both the House and the Senate.

Update on Commonwealth Financial System Transition to Mosaic and Reporting Status

The Commonwealth recently replaced the 22-year-old MAS financial system with a new platform called Mosaic, which went live on February 23rd and is intended to centralize financial operations and provide enhanced functionality. Following the transition, there were statewide issues with the availability of post February 23rd data in the Information Data Warehouse portal used for financial reporting. The data portal has since been updated, and CPCS is actively reviewing reports to ensure accuracy, with the commitment report expected to be available for the May committee meeting.

3. Counsel Capacity and Hiring Update

Chief Counsel Anthony Benedetti, Private Counsel Division Deputy Chief Counsel Holly Smith, and Public Defender Division Deputy Chief Counsel Arnie Stewart provided an update on counsel capacity and hiring efforts. They reported ongoing discussions with District Court, BMC, and Trial Court leadership about continued difficulties appointing counsel. The parties recently met to address these issues and agreed to continue meeting regularly on a regular basis.

Ms. Smith reported that, despite recent hiring gains, operational strain continues across the system. She noted that 37 new private attorneys are expected to join the upcoming Zealous class. While increased staffing has helped reduce delays, some defendants are still appearing in court without counsel. She also discussed fluctuations in case assignments and the continued need for the incentive program to maintain capacity. Ms. Smith thanked the Committee for approving the extension of the incentive program last month.

Mr. Benedetti and Ms. Stewart reported continued progress in staff recruitment and hiring, with approximately 141 attorneys added between September 2025 and the September 2026 class, primarily in Suffolk and Middlesex counties. They noted that recruitment efforts remain strong, with hundreds of applications received and interviews ongoing.

Ms. Stewart also described the scope of the hiring effort, including recruitment, interviewing, application processing, and onboarding. She explained that most supervisory positions have been filled through internal promotions, with some external hires. She further clarified that the reported hiring figures do not include additional support professionals hired during this period, such as investigators, social workers, and administrative assistants.

4. Fiscal Year 2027 Update

Chief Counsel Anthony Benedetti and General Counsel Lisa Hewitt provided an update regarding the fiscal year 2027 budget. Ms. Hewitt stated that the Senate has passed the Supplemental Budget, and it is hoped that it will move quickly to the Governor's desk, although we are unsure if it will proceed through a conference committee.

Mr. Benedetti stated that the House Ways and Means proposal mirrors the Governor's recommendation, with only a symbolic \$1 increase (bringing funding to \$150,000,001) in the 0321-1500 line-item. While early, both Mr. Benedetti and Ms. Hewitt described the proposal as encouraging given current fiscal constraints.

Ms. Hewitt noted that a key concern is that the Court Cost/Experts 0321-1520 line remains underfunded at \$25 million, below the \$35–\$38 million needed, and that is expected to be funded in the current year though the pending supplemental budget.

Overall, Mr. Benedetti emphasized that CPCS is in a relatively good position considering broader state spending cuts. Ms. Hewitt also highlighted a potential funding boost through the immigration representation fund, for which an increase has been proposed, and which could result in additional grant support for CPCS immigration work.

5. Chief Counsel's Report

Chief Counsel Anthony Benedetti provided comprehensive and informative updates on CPCS activities, oversight, operational, and organizational matters.

Oversight Reviews and Litigation

Mr. Benedetti reported that the Office of the Inspector General's examination of CPCS is progressing, with the agency continuing to respond promptly to information requests. A report is required and expected at the end of the fiscal year; however, related litigation concerning the protection of confidential client information remains pending and may extend beyond that timeline, potentially resulting in an interim report. Mr. Benedetti also noted steady progress in the State Auditor's review, with an informal exit conference completed in mid-March, a formal exit conference forthcoming, and a final report anticipated by the end of June. The audit is focused on technology, privacy practices, and system access.

Management Training Initiative

Mr. Benedetti highlighted the successful rollout of a comprehensive management training program for all CPCS managers. The agency's transition to working with the Management Center has been well received, with participants reporting strong engagement and value. The training supports leadership development at a critical time of organizational growth and is expected to further strengthen management effectiveness across the agency.

External Engagement and Policy Work

Mr. Benedetti noted a recent visit to MCI Norfolk with General Counsel Lisa Hewitt and Youth Advocacy Division Deputy Chief Counsel Duci Goncalves, where they met with the African American Coalition Committee at the request of and in collaboration with Representative Russell Holmes. The discussion provided an opportunity to share CPCS's work on emerging adults, including litigation efforts and legislative initiatives such as "Raise the Age," and reflects continued meaningful engagement with community stakeholders.

Operational Capacity and Staff Efforts

Mr. Benedetti recognized the significant and ongoing efforts of CPCS staff, who are advancing large-scale hiring and expansion initiatives while also supporting audit responses and addressing logistical needs such as space planning. These efforts are being carried out alongside day-to-day responsibilities, demonstrating a strong organizational commitment and capacity during a period of growth.

Leadership Transition

Mr. Benedetti reported that Chief of Administration and Operations Tere Ramos has departed CPCS to return to her prior focus in disability law. He noted that CPCS is well positioned in this transition, with Nancy Baratta serving as Acting Chief and bringing substantial experience within the agency. The position has already been posted.

The next meeting date is May 20th, and the meeting will be remote. There being no further business to come before the Committee, the Committee adjourned at approximately 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

Jennifer McKinnon

Jennifer McKinnon, Chair
for Mia Alvarado, Secretary