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Comprehensive Substance Abuse Council (CSAC) Meets Quarterly

The Comprehensive Substance Abuse Council (CSAC) convened at 9:00 AM on Thursday February, 16th at the Veterans Affairs Office in Tafuna to receive updates and presentations from its committees and the Department of Legal Affairs.

The 23-member Council of government, private, and community stakeholders was created by Executive Order #003-2022 and signed by Governor Lemanu in 2022 to address drug issues in the Territory holistically and improve cross sectoral communication and collaboration. 3 committees or working groups focused on rehabilitation and treatment, enforcement, and public outreach are being led by relevant departments to develop strategies and solutions for discussion and implementation by the Council.

CSAC Chairman and Acting Governor Talauega Ale provided opening remarks and spoke to the importance of this council and its members in furthering the Administration's priority of combatting the growing substance use issues in the Territory. "The work we have to do is great and the only way we can succeed is if we work together", remarked the Chairman.

The meeting agenda lasted two hours and included a full schedule of presentations from each of the committees and updates since the last CSAC quarterly meeting in November.

- The Department of Legal Affairs' Assistant Attorney General Ms. Lynne Blankebeker presented on new funding that has been made available to the Territory as a result of the opioid settlement. Blankenbeker discussed the core strategies that have been laid out regarding the authorized usage of these opioid settlement funds. The Department of Legal affairs will release further details to the media and public on the amounts allocated to American Samoa as a result of the opioid settlement agreement.
- The Department of Health Director Motusa and Behavioral Health Program Director Talalupe Fiso presented on behalf of the rehabilitation and treatment committee and

discussed the transfer and consolidation of behavioral programs, personnel, and funds from the Department of Human and Social Services to the Department of Health. Some of the outcomes shared by the Department of Health include a single point of entry, improved collaboration and coordination, and the involvement of community partners. In addition, DOH Director provided brief updates to the Council on the planning of the \$24 Million ARPA funded rehabilitation facility.

- Deputy Secretary of Samoan Affairs Tauese Vaa Sunia on behalf of the Education and Outreach Committee and in collaboration with the Enforcement Committee presented some data points on the growing issue of Methamphetamine which has rapidly become the drug of preference in American Samoa. Sunia provided a comprehensive overview on the distribution, manufacturing, and economics of methamphetamine. In addition, he emphasized that the data doesn't accurately paint the full picture of the meth problem in the Territory. Rather, he suggested that one person facing substance use challenges often impacts entire families to include spouses, children, and the extended family. He stressed to the Council and committees that collective efforts must be taken by the entire community — government, villages, churches, classrooms, and households. Sunia shared a schedule of upcoming outreach events taking place at CCCAS for the remainder of the month.

The agenda concluded with both questions and recommendations from Council members on proposed use of Opioid settlement funds for further consideration by the Council and final remarks Samoan Affairs Secretary Mauga Tasi Asuega and DPS Commission Lefiti Pese.

In his closing remarks, Chair Talauega Ale concluded with hopes that the presentations today touched hearts and emotions as it did his. "If you're wondering whether we have a drug problem, it's yes. It is very profitable and we have a difficult task ahead in preventing our youth and community members from falling victim to this disease", closed Ale.

The next CSAC quarterly meeting has been scheduled for May 18th and committees have been encouraged by the Chair to continue meeting to advance their respective committee goals.

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