

Minutes: Nursing Home Workforce Standards Board

Date: Thursday, March 12, 2026

Minutes prepared by: Linnea Pignatello

Location: Hybrid – Washington Room at the Department of Labor and Industry and via Webex

Attendance

Members present

Commissioner Nicole Blissenbach
Michelle Armstrong
Kim Brenne
Maria King
Katie Lundmark (joined remotely at 11:04 a.m.)
Paula Rocheleau
Mary Swanson

Visitors present

Bonita Benton
Todd Bergstrom
Matthew Blake
Chastity Blokzyl
Jeff Bostic
Teresa Brees
Jake Brown
Kathy Didling
Heidi Eckman
Yankuba Fadera
Viola Gbmlea
Gladys Gekonge
Jo Holtzkamp
Steve Hunt
Vandaryl Johnson
Margarette Joufusu
Josly Kale
Koffi Labah
Rhonda Little
Amy Oliver
Piper Russell
Rasha Ahmed Sharif

Jacob Skahl
Taiwo Sodunola
Tim Sorenson
Lillian VanDerPol
David Ward
Chunsay Williams
Linda Zopfi

DLI staff members present

Paul Enger
Ken McGurran
Linnea Pignatello
Leah Solo

Agenda items

1. **Call to order** – The meeting was called to order by Executive Director Leah Solo at 11 a.m. With chair Jamie Gulley’s absence, Executive Director Solo indicated that without objection she would walk the board through the meeting. With no objection, roll call was taken and a quorum was declared.
2. **Approval of agenda** – Executive Director Solo verbally added two items to the agenda (an update from the Office of General Counsel and a member of the public requesting time to speak to the board) before asking for a motion to approve it. A motion to approve the agenda as amended was made by Kim Brenne and seconded by Paula Rocheleau. A roll call vote was taken and the motion passed unanimously.
3. **Approval of drafted meeting minutes** – A motion to approve the Feb. 12, 2026, drafted meeting minutes as presented was made by Commissioner Nicole Blissenbach and seconded by Mary Swanson. A roll call vote was taken and the motion passed unanimously.
4. **Board updates** –
 - Chastity Blokzyl shared her statement with the board on behalf of a nonprofit corporation advocating for nursing home workers, asking for the board to make a standard requiring the minimum-wage standards be made retroactive when the State Plan Amendment (SPA) is approved and for the board to make rules restricting the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency’s presence in nursing homes.
 - Solo updated the board that there is no SPA update; it has been 61 days since the SPA was submitted. Solo reminded the board that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) can ask questions, which would pause and restart the 90-day clock. As is written, the Minnesota Department of Human Services has indicated the SPA includes the 2027 wage increase as well.
 - Solo walked through the memo about the structure of the board. Solo asked the discussion questions at the end of the memo and asked the board for feedback about the workgroup meetings and the makeup of those.
 - Swanson spoke about the meetings, specifically the public engagement meetings and the desire to keep them hybrid, with Michelle Armstrong in agreement. Commissioner Blissenbach talked about combining the Wavier Review and the Waiver and Variances workgroups and suggested

the Principles Workgroup be dissolved until a later time when, or if, it is needed again. Brenne suggested combining groups and meeting less frequently, but for a longer period of time, and Rocheleau agreed. Swanson asked how many meetings are required by statute and Paul Enger said the Nursing Home Workforce Standards Board bylaws state no number of workgroup meetings is required. Brenne asked in situations where the board delegates tasks, who is this delegated to? Blissenbach said it would be Solo. Rocheleau suggested rotating who is in the office for the meetings and that if the meetings were planned ahead of time people from Greater Minnesota could make time to travel. Solo offered that staff members propose a couple of options for condensing meetings and having an alternate date standing in case a meeting at the Department of Labor and Industry (DLI) needs to be canceled.

- Solo reviewed the annual review of the training curriculum memo and the three options she proposes. The barrier with options one and three is that the board would likely have to open the recertification process for worker organizations twice in a very short amount of time. Option two seemed to the members to be the best plan moving forward, with Commissioner Blissenbach and Brenne expressing their favor.
- Solo talked about an evergreen survey being a spot that could collect information about a variety of topics.

5. Waiver application –

- Currently, there is no formal recommendation from the workgroup about whether to approve the waiver request. However, the workgroup asked the applicant follow-up questions and those have been answered. Solo shared the clarifications: This is an application for a waiver from the holiday pay rules the board previously granted for a portion of 2025, consolidated and updated financials, and responses to questions regarding their financials.
- Commissioner Blissenbach asked if there have been any significant changes in the circumstances since the last time this applicant received a waiver; Solo said there has not been significant change, with Brenne in agreement. With that, Blissenbach said that without significant change in circumstances it seems the same outcome is reasonable. There was discussion amongst members. A motion was made to approve the waiver by Katie Lundmark and seconded by Swanson. A roll call was taken and the motion was approved unanimously.

6. New business –

- Paul Enger (counsel for the board) spoke to the board about a lawsuit that has been filed against Commissioner Blissenbach in her capacity as the commissioner of DLI, as well as a member of the Nursing Home Workforce Standards Board and Gulley as chair of the Nursing Home Workforce Standards Board. This lawsuit has been filed in the U.S. District Court. Enger said a litigation hold will be issued in the near future, and the previously existing litigation hold remains in effect, so members should retain materials related to the board.

7. Next meeting – The next meeting is Thursday, April 9, 2026.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Commissioner Blissenbach to adjourn the meeting at 11:40 a.m. and seconded by Armstrong. A roll call vote was taken and the motion passed unanimously.