

STATE OF NEW MEXICO
ADVISORY COUNCIL ON WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND
OCCUPATIONAL DISEASE DISABLEMENT
MEETING MINUTES
March 17, 2026

Location: Workers' Compensation Administration Office, Albuquerque, NM

Council Members Present:

Marni Goodrich, Chair
Annie Scoggins
Darrell Deaguero
Sarah Ranney
Chris O'Sickey
Director Heather Jordan, ex-officio

Council Members Absent:

Courtenay Eichhorst

- I. **Call to Order and Introductions:**
Chair Marni Goodrich called to order at 2:34 p.m. Council members and attendees introduced themselves.
- II. **Approval of Agenda:**
Darrell Deaguero moved to approve the agenda. The motion was seconded by Sarah Ranney. Motion carried unanimously.
- III. **Approval of Minutes:**
Darrell Deaguero moved to approve the minutes from the September 30, 2025 meeting. The motion was seconded by Annie Scoggins. Motion carried unanimously.
- IV. **Director Report:**
Director Heather Jordan introduced several new hires and provided an update on staffing, agency operations, legislation, and agency initiatives.

The Director reported that the agency currently has a vacancy rate of approximately 14 percent. Several positions remain posted, including Compliance Officer and Clerk of the Court positions.

The Director also provided a legislative update. House Bill 128 updated existing presumptions for firefighters and added two additional cancers, including cancers

affecting women. The bill also establishes a five-year period in which a firefighter may still file a claim after leaving service, although the burden of proof shifts to the worker after a certain point. Sarah Ranney shared that she had been involved in the original bill and expressed relief and appreciation for the updates. Questions were raised regarding volunteer firefighters and whether they are covered. It was noted that this issue may need to be addressed separately, as volunteer firefighters are typically covered through self-insured counties or municipalities.

The Director reported that House Bill 132, which would have created similar presumptions for police officers, did not pass because the final committee hearing could not be scheduled before the end of the session.

Regarding the budget, the Director stated that House Bill 2 adopted the Legislative Finance Committee recommendation rather than the agency's full request. The final budget includes a reduction of approximately \$500,000, as well as a \$250,000 transfer to Workforce Solutions. As a result, the agency will not be able to fill all vacant positions this year.

For the current fiscal year, the agency has requested use of the 5 percent bar, which is still pending approval. The request totals approximately \$600,000 and would come from agency savings. According to the Director, this would ensure that the Uninsured Employers' Fund remains funded through the end of the fiscal year. She added that the agency may need to exercise the 5 percent request again next year.

The Director also highlighted several agency initiatives. The Pantry Project has identified one pantry in each region. Staff were provided with training focused on workplace safety and food insecurity, with the message that food insecurity affects many New Mexicans, including injured workers.

The new workplace poster initiative continues to expand, with more than 5,000 posters delivered statewide.

The Director noted that EDI 3.1 went live on November 7, 2025.

The agency's new case management system is back on track after being delayed last year. The expected go-live date is in June. The Director explained that the agency had to reevaluate staff needs to ensure the new system would allow employees to perform their work efficiently. WCA has been meeting frequently with the vendor. She noted that the agency has operated in silos for a long time and that current systems have become unstable. The new platform will allow most of the agency to work within one system, with role-based access controls in place. External users will not have access to sensitive internal matters. The Director described the new system as user-friendly,

accessible, and flexible enough to allow future enhancements. In response to a question, she said the system does not currently include built-in AI tools, and the agency remains limited in which platforms it can use.

The Director also reported that the front of the building has been brought up to code and now looks much improved. Additional updates under consideration include new exterior lettering and power washing.

The following staffing changes and new hires were also announced:

Bill Grigg – Assistant General Counsel
Nita Day – Enforcement Bureau Chief
Valerie Martinez – HR Manager
Patrick Guerin – Senior HR Generalist
Alexis Armijo – promoted to Operations Administrator
Julie Head – promoted to Field Office Manager
Crystal Lobato – Farmington Ombudsman
Roman Alvarado – IT Systems Administrator
Jor-el Padilla – Financial Auditor
Larry Gutierrez – Safety Consultant

The Director also noted the retirements of Cathy, Pauline, and Judge Sonya Carrasco-Trujillo.

V. 2025 Annual Report

The Council reviewed the 2025 Annual Report. Several minor edits were identified, including adding the Director's name on page 3, correcting Chris O'Sickey's last name, and spelling out "IME" on page 10.

Sarah Ranney moved to approve the report with the noted changes. The motion was seconded by Darrell Deaguero. Motion carried unanimously.

VI. Legislative Sub Committee Update:

The Council noted that most of the legislative update had already been covered during the Director's report. Members discussed the limited number of workers' compensation bills introduced this session, as well as broader medical and medical malpractice bills being tracked. It was noted that recent changes to medical malpractice law may improve access to providers.

VII. Public Comment:

Merilee commented on the need to improve injured workers' access to doctors, noting that better provider access would lead to better outcomes for workers. She expressed

concern that the new medical malpractice law may face legal challenge and stated that WCA should be prepared to defend the law and maintain public awareness of its importance. She also encouraged the agency to continue doing what it can to improve access to medical care for injured workers.

Merilee further commented that the Notice of Accident (NOA) form should be updated. She noted that the original purpose of the form was to create both a carbon copy and a receipt and stated that she would prepare a memo on the issue.

Merilee also discussed the history of lump-sum settlements in New Mexico workers' compensation law. She explained that when workers' compensation reform was enacted in 1990, lawmakers were concerned that injured workers might not be able to manage large lump-sum payments responsibly. As a result, the law initially prohibited lump-sum settlements. This was intended as a worker protection, though it was unpopular with both insurers and attorneys. Over time, the law was changed to allow lump-sum settlements again. Merilee noted that, to her knowledge, the long-term impact of those changes has never been fully studied.

She then discussed Medicare set-asides in relation to lump-sum settlements and observed that the new medical malpractice law now prohibits lump-sum settlements for medical damages. She suggested that this may become a vulnerable part of the law and stated that, although New Mexico has prior experience with lump-sum restrictions in workers' compensation, the consequences of those earlier changes were not formally studied.

A broader discussion of the NOA form followed.

VIII. **Next Meeting:**

The next meeting was scheduled for **May 14, 2026, at 2:30 p.m.**

IX. **Adjourn:**

X. Annie Scoggins moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Sarah Ranney. Motion carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 3:54 p.m.