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TRACIE L. COVEY
CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE

LEIGHANN Y. BROWN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

JUSTIN DENTON
ALISON FERRARA
LAUREN CHATTERTON
CATHERINE ADLERMAN
PRINCIPAL ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGES

Board Meeting

Draft Minutes

Date: Wednesday, January 14, 2026

Location: Menands, NY

Present: Geraldine A. Reilly, Chair

Randall T. Douglas, Member

Marilyn P. O'Mara, Member

Kimberly Jean-Pierre, Member

Tracie Covey, Chief Administrative Law Judge

Leighann Brown, Executive Director

Catherine Adlerman, Acting Principal Administrative Law Judge

Absent:

June F. O'Neill, Member

Agenda:

1. Welcome
2. Call to Order
3. Roll Call
4. Reading and adoption of agenda
5. Reading and adoption of minutes – October 15, 2025, meeting
6. Executive Director's Report
7. Chief Administrative Law Judge's report
8. Principal ALJ for Appeals' Report
9. Other
10. Adjourn

- **Call to Order/Welcome**

  - Board Chair Geraldine Reilly began her remarks by welcoming all attending and those watching remotely to this meeting of the New York State Unemployment Insurance Appeal Board (UIAB), which was the first meeting of 2026. She added that she was located at the Board's headquarters in Menands, New York.
  - Chair Reilly thanked all those attending and watching the meeting for their interest in the operations and management of the UIAB. She added that the UIAB is an adjudicative body with jurisdiction over disputes regarding eligibility and payments concerning New York State Unemployment Insurance. She thanked everyone for their continuing interest in this consequential work.
  - The meeting was noticed, the draft agenda was published, the minutes from the previous meeting, October 15, 2025, were circulated to the members, and the public was invited to observe in real-time. This meeting was recorded and will be made available, along with the minutes, on the UIAB website, https://uiappeals.ny.gov.
  - Chair Reilly expressed her thanks to all of those who have supported the work of the Board in addressing the many challenges they have faced. In addition, she thanked the staff and leadership in all the UIAB offices, and she thanked her colleagues on the Board for their work, encouragement, and support.
  - Reilly acknowledged the myriad technological innovations which this year has brought. The UIAB has accomplished much through the expertise and innovations of the leadership team, ensuring a workplace that is better and more efficient while ensuring a continuing excellent product in a customer friendly environment.
  - She continued by saying that you will hear more about these exciting projects during the executive presentations but be assured that this time of technological advancement will change many aspects of how work is done, all in the interest of serving the customers and employees in a smarter and better way. These include Virtual Hearings, Electronic Case Files, and improved Customer Service Communication System, and overall UI system upgrades already accomplished or on the horizon. Additionally, the Board is exploring potential uses for Artificial Intelligence and its many applications.
  - Chair Reilly added that she hopes that this consistent schedule of Board meetings presents a Board that is proactive and accessible; a Board which aggressively addresses 21st-century challenges; and that the UIAB addresses those tasks with optimism and confidence in the skill and effort of its many talented employees.
  - Chair Reilly went on to say that each Board Member and each staff member is serious, interested, industrious and engaged in their approach to the important work done at the UIAB. She sincerely thanked them for that.
  - Reilly also wanted to acknowledge and thank CALJ Tracie Covey, who is based in Syracuse, but attending the meeting in Menands; and has worked tirelessly to advance

the Board and its Mission. Tracie assumed this role in a time of pandemic crisis and has led the Board judiciously with empathy, wisdom, and compassion, ever since.

- Chair Reilly acknowledged Leigh Brown, the UIAB's talented and innovative Executive Director, who attended the meeting in Menands. She thanked Leigh for demonstrating the highly valued qualities of leadership, fairness and innovation.
- Reilly also thanked Catherine Adlerman, the UIAB's Acting PALJ for Appeals, who was present in Menands, for presenting today's report on Higher Authority Appeals. Adlerman has been with the Board for many years and is widely viewed as a reasoned and valued voice in the adjudication of Higher Authority Appeals. Reilly expressed appreciation for Adlerman's expertise and willingness to share her knowledge with the Board.
- Reilly continued by thanking Heidi Kelly for taking today's meeting minutes, and the UIAB's talented BSA team of Amy Higby, Nastassia Tripp, and Gerrad Bohl who assisted with technology for this meeting. There will be a brief BSA-led training session after today's meeting regarding the much-anticipated Unemployment Services System upgrade (USS).
- Chair Reilly took a moment before calling the meeting to order to remind members, staff, and the public that the next public meeting of the Board will be held on Wednesday, April 15, 2026.
- The meeting was called to order at 11:00 a.m.

- **Roll Call**
  - Attendance was taken by Executive Director Leigh Brown. A quorum was present.
- **Reading and adoption of the agenda**
  - Member Marilyn O'Mara moved to accept the agenda.
  - Member Kimberly Jean-Pierre seconded the motion.
  - Motion to accept agenda adopted unanimously.
- **Reading and Adoption of the minutes from the October 15, 2025, Board Meeting**
  - Member Randall Douglas moved to waive the reading and to adopt the minutes.
  - Member Kimberly Jean-Pierre seconded the motion.
  - Motion to suspend reading and adoption of the minutes unanimously approved.
- **Executive Director Report – Leighann Brown**
  - Introduction**:** Executive Director Brown began her report by wishing everyone a Happy New Year and stating that she will present an overview of the UIAB's achievements and advancements throughout 2025. She added that Chief Administrative Law Judge, Tracie Covey, (CALJ Covey) will also share the past year's achievements of the judicial team. The

progress of the past year was achieved with steadfast commitment to prioritizing and enhancing customer service across all UIAB operations.

- 2025 Achievements and Advancements**:**
    - A key focus in 2025 was the sustained development and retention of the administrative team. Of the 39 administrative staff members, 18 have joined within the last five years, reflecting an evolving workforce. A comparative analysis of staff departures revealed a notable difference between administrative personnel and judges. Approximately 75% of administrative staff who left did so to pursue new opportunities, whereas 25% retired. This trend is understandable given the salary grade range of our administrative staff, from Salary Grade (SG) 6 to SG 25, which naturally presents avenues for career advancement and new professional pursuits.
    - 2025 saw the successful implementation and advancement of several projects designed to improve efficiency and accessibility. They are as follows:
    - Virtual Hearings: The UIAB successfully conducted virtual hearings, ensuring continued accessibility for all participants. The Virtual Hearing Center (VHC) landing page has been updated to offer login and hearing access in all 16 required languages, ensuring inclusivity for participants.
    - Interactive Voice Response (IVR): IVR is an automated telephone system technology which allows callers to interact with administrative staff via the admins' computer system through voice or keypad inputs. Focusing on customer service, 60 calls were successfully reviewed monthly. Each review was summarized by one of the supervisors and provided to the appropriate admin employee. The team did remarkable well. Most summaries were good with a few tips or ideas for the future. In 2026, we will work on a scoring system as the judges have for their QA and FQR.
    - Electronic Case Filing (ECF) Project: The final move from paper to an ECF was a pivotal move to streamline the case management processes and to allow the UIAB to be fully adaptable and respond to emergencies, such as poor weather, so to maintain our scheduled hearings and reduce adjournments or rescheduling.
    - Enhanced Robocall Hearing Reminders: Improvements to our robocall hearing reminders included a direct connection option to UIAB administration for immediate support, further improving caller experience and an option for a text reminder with the hearing link, date, and time.
    - Inter-Agency Technology Evaluation: An on-site evaluation of technology systems, processes, and workflows between the New York State Department of Labor's Adjudication Services Office (ASO) and the UIAB was conducted from September 2nd to the 12th. The vendor's report identified inefficiencies and areas for improvement, while also validating the effectiveness of our ongoing initiatives, including administrative centralization, new laptop issuance, and increased judicial

staffing. Recommendations for leveraging judicial calendars to enhance hearing throughput have been implemented.

- Customer Service Excellence: Our administrative team's exceptional performance in handling phone inquiries remains a cornerstone of the UIAB's success. While the average customer service score for an IVR system typically ranges between 80-85%, the UIAB established a baseline of 95% for our operations, recognizing the high-stress nature of the calls received. The team's skill in assisting New Yorkers during challenging times is commendable. All administrative staff are trained on IVR utilization and have access to peer and supervisory support when needed. Through an "all-hands-on-deck" approach, we aimed for callers to wait in the queue for no longer than five minutes. In 2025, we managed 59,588 phone calls, achieving an average wait time of just 17 seconds and an overall customer service score of 97.35%. This performance is particularly noteworthy given the high turnover experienced over the past five years, demonstrating the team's dedication and exceeding all expectations.
- UIAB SharePoint Communication Intranet (SP): To foster enhanced internal communication and streamline access to essential tools, we launched our custom SP was launched, which serves as a central hub for email updates, a "Kudos Corner" for recognizing achievements, dedicated Judicial and Admin hubs, UIAB Production Metrics, training announcements, monthly "Tech Tips," and a wealth of other resources.
- Monthly Tech Tips: Gerrad Bohl, BSA2 in Menands, developed the monthly "Tech Tips," to help all staff learn about technology tools which may help in their day-to-day work and help prepare for the Unemployment Insurance system upgrade.
- Employee Ticketing System: In collaboration with ITS, the UIAB identified and launched a solution to improve employee assistance and gather longitudinal data on recurring issues. This ticketing system was integrated with the SP for seamless access.
- UIAB Website Quality Assurance Score: The BSA Team was recognized each month in 2025 by ITS for having the highest Quality Assurance score for its website. ITS is changing the reporting in 2026 so the UIAB will not know if it continues to hold the highest score statewide.
- Lastly, Executive Director Brown thanked her Executive colleagues, the judges and the admin for making 2025 such a great year. They have seen a lot of change and their resilience is commendable.

- Current Initiatives

- Unemployment Insurance (UI) System upgrade: Moving on to 2026, we are preparing for staff training for the UI System upgrade. Mr. Bohl and Sam Clute (BSA1 in Menands) are helping the trainers to organize and record training, which will take place from January 28th through February 3rd. The entire staff will attend training at the same time. An end user procedure manual will accompany each training video. Board Members will receive training following the April Board meeting. We will prepare in-person training for Board Members who will not be in Menands in April. I will have more information for you after the staff's training. The official go-live date is yet to be announced.

- Learning Lounges: Mr. Bohl is also planning a schedule to present regular "Learning Lounges" to offer staff an opportunity to have regular practice with the UI System upgrade and ask questions. Following this available training there's a team who can meet with staff one-on-one by appointment if the statewide and extra training is not sufficient. The UIAB will ensure each employee is fully prepared for go-live.

- New York State Public Employees Federation Leadership Development Program (LDP): Executive Director Brown detailed the LDP. She stated that Mr. Bohl and Eric Koslofsky, (BSA2 in Brooklyn) were selected as participants in the 2025 LDP. The LDP is designed for employees in the Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (PS&T) Unit, with a SG23 or higher, to enhance the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to be an effective and successful leader in New York State government. Mr. Bohl graduated from the program on Friday, January 9th. Mr. Koslofsky will graduate on Friday, January 30th. Promoting the leadership programs available to us statistically fosters a more stable work environment, enables faster responses to crises and change and enhances organizational resilience. This helps with developing individual talent while also building a more robust leadership pipeline to ensure readiness for future challenges and strengthens overall organizational performance.

- Conclusion: Executive Director Brown concluded her report stating that, as in past years, 2026 will continue the UIAB's focus on customer strategies and technology for both external and internal customers by continuing the development of employees for the utmost success and fulfillment in their work. The UIAB is proud of all the efforts to enhance service accessibility, support, mechanisms, and benefit delivery. Every employee plays a vital role in connecting with customers and contributing to the agency's collective success. We remain committed to listening to the needs of those who are served and responding with purpose to achieve meaningful outcomes. Executive Director Brown thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak and concluded her report.

- **Chair Reilly** thanked Executive Director Brown for her comprehensive report highlighting the UIAB team's many accomplishments, especially noting the remarkable 17-second average wait time for calls to the UIAB; and asked of there were any other remarks.

- Member Kimberly Jean-Pierre remarked on the impressive number of calls that are managed by UIAB staff.
- Chair Reilly asked for a motion to accept the Executive Directors report and incorporate it into the record.
- Member Randall Douglas moved to accept the report into the record. Member Marilyn O'Mara seconded. The report was unanimously accepted into the record.

- **Chief Administrative Law Judge's Report - Tracie Covey**
  - Introduction: CALJ Covey began by wishing all a good morning and stating she is happy to be able to ring in 2026 and provide an update on the judicial side of our operations today.
  - Technology:
    - CALJ Covey started her report with a nod to Executive Director Brown's report and stated that as Executive Director Brown's report makes clear, we saw a multitude of technological changes and upgrades at the Board in 2025. Throughout all these changes, our focus on the judicial side has continued to be on finding ways to increase our hearing and appeal throughput at the lower and higher authorities, decrease our current backlog, and shorten the length of time it currently takes cases to work their way through our system.
    - The most direct way we continue to address this challenge is through increased staffing.
  - Judicial Staffing:
    - As you may be aware, despite our best efforts, our judicial staffing has decreased significantly over the last 5 years. In 2021, we had approximately 75 judicial employees at the Board. Since that time, we have had almost 30 judicial retirements and other staff turnover which led us to engage in extensive recruitment efforts. This resulted in the hiring and retention of about 20 new judges over the last 2 years. However, we also know there will continue to be significant judicial retirements over the next few years, so we will continue these recruitment efforts throughout 2026. It is our intention to hire 2 large judicial classes of up to 15 judges each, one to start in the spring, and one to start in the fall. Our first recruitment is already underway. We currently have open ALJ positions posted across the state. Those postings close January 22. We anticipate that the start date for this next class will be in April.

    - The UIAB has increased the number of hearings that can be held per week by further leveraging what is referred to as, quote, "pool" cases. These cases are not assigned to a specific judge when the notice of hearing is issued; rather, on the day of the hearing, we assign those cases to judges who have openings in their schedule (generally because parties fail to appear for a scheduled hearing, or a matter must be

adjourned before the hearing takes place). For approximately one month this fall, we instituted a "super pool" where we scheduled upwards of 50-100 unassigned cases per day with a small team of ALJs. They were tasked with completing as many hearings as they could each day. Anything that the super pool team could not handle was assigned to other judges whose hearings defaulted or been adjourned. While this allowed us to schedule, hear, and decide many cases, it was very taxing on both our systems and on our staff. We worked through those issues and will likely schedule "super pool" intermittently throughout next year to address a particular subset of UIAB inventory.

- CALJ Covey continued by stating that pool, super pool, other creative calendaring measures, and the hiring of new judges, allowed for an approximately 18% increase in hearing throughput between 2024 and 2025. This is a remarkable feat, especially since judicial staff are also working on other very important projects, including the ongoing computer system upgrade, development and update of necessary training materials, and the CLE library. Not to mention, new judges go through a 7-week training course, are not on full calendar until approximately 4 months after their hire date, and are observed, audited, and regularly coached by their senior judges throughout their first year, which takes the seniors away from their own hearing calendars. The fact that judicial staff could increase output by 18% despite all of those things is quite amazing.

- The current staffing level at the higher authority is also extremely low resulting in a growing backlog. Over the next year, the UIAB will be evaluating additional staffing shifts from the lower to the higher authority and will continue to investigate ways to increase our efficiency and output at that level. However, despite these challenges, there was an increase in production of about 19% at the higher authority from 2024 to 2025.

- CALJ Covey added that those successes were possible due to the continued dedication, flexibility, and hard work of both the judicial and the administrative staff. It was a very busy year, and they all deserve kudos for how much they were able to accomplish.

- Continuing Legal Education (CLE) library: CALJ Covey detailed the success of the Continuing Legal Education (CLE) library which opened a year ago, and which has steadily increased the number of available training courses. Attorneys and non-attorneys from the Board, the Department of Labor, and even some attorneys who work for different state agencies and authorities, take UIAB classes for CLE credit. Covey said that the UIAB will continue to develop and share new programs throughout the next year.

- QA/FQR: CALJ Covey stated that the UIAB continues to excel in the Federal Quarterly Reviews (FQR). For the third quarter of 2025, the UIAB had a perfect score of 100% for all 20 reviewed cases. While the UIAB generally scores somewhere in the very high 90s, this is the first time CALJ Covey has seen a perfect score. FQR audits are currently being conducted for the fourth quarter of 2025, which she will report on at the next Board meeting.
- Statistics:
  - CALJ Covey reported that while the quality remains high, low staffing levels continue to negatively impact the UIAB's ability to meet the USDOL acceptable level of performance markers at the Lower Authority. This is due to our current backlog. Validated data shows that the average case age for the lower authority for November was 60.67, a decrease of 1.64 days from the last report. However, it is still well-above the acceptable 30-day average. The focus is still on scheduling the oldest cases first, so until the inventory is decreased the Lower Authority will continue to struggle with these metrics.
  - At the higher authority, the average case age continues to increase. Validated data shows that case age in November was 57.33, which continues to be above the 40-day acceptable limit. This was an increase in the average case age of approximately 4 days since CALJ Covey's last report. Again, this is due to high inventory and low staffing.
- Conclusion: CALJ Covey conclude her report by stating that 2025 was a busy and challenging year. She is proud of all staff, both judicial and administrative, for their efforts and unfaltering dedication to the UIAB mission and the people of New York State. 2026 will have its own challenges and CALJ Covey is confident that the fantastic staff at the Board will meet them head on and will have a very successful year. CALJ Covey thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak and concluded her report.

- **Chair Reilly** thanked CALJ Covey for her comprehensive and remarkable report. Chair Reilly thanked CALJ Covey for her creativity and ingenuity, and inspiring the judicial team to accomplish what they have despite having to do more with less. She thanked her for making that happen, adding that she also has never seen a perfect FQR score of 100%, which stands as a testament to the work CALJ Covey has done. Chair Reilly asked if there were any other remarks, thoughts, or comments.
  - Member Randall Douglas commented that the quality of the judicial work is impressive. He also has never seen a perfect FQR score, which he commented is even more impressive considering staffing challenges and other factors.
    - Covey credited the whole team and Member Douglas concurred, adding that all the accomplishments reflect the whole team including administrative and executive.

- Chair Reilly asked if there were no other comments if there was a motion to accept the Chief Judge's report and incorporate it into the record.
- Member Marilyn O'Mara moved to accept the report into the record. Member Kimberly Jean-Pierre seconded. The report was unanimously accepted into the record.

- **Principal ALJ Report – Catherine Adlerman**
  - Acting Principal ALJ Adlerman discussed four cases affirmed by the Court:
    - *Matter of Debra Palmieri* (Commissioner of Labor) CV-23-0574 November 6, 2025
    - *Matter of Gaffney* (Commissioner of Labor) CV-25-0478 November 6, 2025
    - *Matter of Gwendolyn Dozier* (Commissioner of Labor) CV-23-2049 December 18, 2025
    - *Matter of Obiozor Anazonwu* (Commissioner of Labor) CV-25-0155 December 18, 2025
  - Conclusion: Adlerman offered to send hard copies of these cases to any Board Member who wishes to review them.

- **Chair Reilly** thanked Cat Adlerman, stating that the decisions she highlighted stand as reminders of how responsive the UIAB is to people's present-day predicaments. It's important that the board is aware, informed, and consistent in its legal interpretations. Chair Reilly asked if there were any other thoughts, or comments on these decisions.

  - Hearing none, Chair Reilly asked if there was a motion to accept and incorporate the report into the record. Member Douglas moved to accept the report into the record and Member O'Mara seconded the motion. The report was unanimously adopted into the record.

- **Other**
  - Chair Reilly asked for any new business and hearing none asked for a motion to adjourn.

- **Adjourn**
  - Member O'Mara moved to adjourn the meeting, and Member Kimberly Jean-Pierre seconded the motion. The motion to adjourn was unanimously adopted. The meeting was adjourned at 11: 34 a.m.

Submitted by Leighann Brown with the assistance of Heidi Packard