Board Meeting
Draft Minutes

Date: Wednesday, April 15, 2026

Location: Menands, NY

Present: Geraldine A. Reilly, Chair

Randall T. Douglas, Member

June O'Neill, Member (via videoconference from Ogdensburg, NY)

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

Agenda:

1. Welcome
2. Call to Order
3. Roll Call
4. Reading and adoption of agenda
5. Reading and adoption of minutes – January 14, 2026, 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 second 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, January 14, 2026, 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 of the UIAB's eight 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 has been a time of technological advancement which will change many aspects of how UIAB 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 and other innovations that have been accomplished or are 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 that they do 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. CALJ Covey assumed this role in a time of pandemic crisis and has led the Board judiciously with empathy, wisdom, compassion, and so well, ever since. Chair Reilly also congratulated Tracie on her 16-year anniversary of state service.

- Chair Reilly acknowledged Leigh Brown, the UIAB's talented and innovative Executive Director, who attended the meeting in Menands. She thanked Leigh for being a beacon demonstrating the highly valued qualities of leadership, fairness and innovation.

- Reilly also thanked newly appointed Principal ALJ for Appeals, Catherine Adlerman, 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 Insurance System Improvement Modernization Project (UISIM).

- 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, July 15, 2026.

- The meeting was called to order at 11:05 a.m.

o **Roll Call**

- Attendance was taken by Executive Director Leigh Brown. A quorum was present.

o **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.

o **Reading and Adoption of the minutes from the January 14, 2026, Board Meeting**

- Member Randall Douglas moved to waive the reading and to adopt the minutes.

- Member Marilyn O'Mara seconded the motion.

- Motion to suspend reading and adoption of the minutes unanimously approved.

o **Executive Director Report – Leighann Brown**

- Introduction**:** Executive Director Brown began her report by wishing everyone a good morning. Director Brown went on to state that the UIAB experienced a dynamic start to 2026, marked by several key initiatives aimed at enhancing operations and exploring new technologies.

- Technology:

    - At the end of January, all staff completed comprehensive training for the impending Unemployment Services System upgrade, preparing them for its launch. The launch date has not yet been determined. Staff have been practicing in the system regularly and

participating in a weekly Unemployment Services System upgrade Office Hours led by our BSA Team and our committed staff working 100% on the project.

- Following the training, Chief Administrative Law Judge Tracie Covey (CALJ Covey) and Director Brown attended an Artificial Intelligence (AI) Lab to investigate how AI could optimize virtual teamwork, remove operational barriers, and benefit UIAB stakeholders. These efforts collectively demonstrate a focus on strategic development and technological advancement within the organization. During the Lab they uncovered several initiatives to focus on streamlining information to stakeholders to enhance their experience in the unemployment insurance (UI) process.

- Following the Lab, UIAB initiated a project to develop an AI Bot designed to handle incoming phone calls and respond to general inquiries by leveraging information publicly available on the UIAB public website (www.uiappeals.ny.gov) and the Department of Labor (DOL) public website. Implementing an AI Bot solution is expected to significantly enhance customer experience and improve the operational efficiency of our current Interactive Voice Response (IVR) phone system. The AI Bot will be capable of addressing basic caller questions and, when necessary, intelligently route callers to the appropriate subject matter experts. This will facilitate quicker access to accurate information for our stakeholders. Furthermore, this initiative is projected to reduce the volume of routine calls and questions directed at the administrative team, enabling our team to dedicate more time and focus on managing more complex tasks and critical responsibilities.

- Director Brown said that there are other exciting judicial initiatives that CALJ Covey is leading for her report. She added that the administrative team is committed to fully supporting these initiatives for the best outcome possible.

Director Brown concluded her report by stating that the UIAB team entered 2026 with a list of goals and ideas which have multiplied in the past quarter. She expressed gratitude to colleagues on the executive team and each member of the UIAB team for their ongoing effort to support our stakeholders and each other with their steadfast commitment to prioritizing and enhancing customer service across all UIAB operations.

- Chair Reilly asked for questions or comments.

  - Board Chair Reilly thanked Executive Director Brown for her comprehensive report and for Director Brown's leadership in recognizing the importance of AI and how it will enhance our operations. Reilly added that Leigh has been a leader for UIAB looking at AI judiciously and making it employee centered and customer focused. Chair Reilly also thanked Director Brown for highlighting the UIAB team's many accomplishments.

  - Member Randall Douglas moved to accept the report into the record. Member Kimberly Jean-Pierre seconded. The report was unanimously accepted and incorporated into the record.

- **Chief Administrative Law Judge's Report - Tracie Covey**

- Introduction: CALJ Covey began by wishing everyone a good morning and stating that the UIAB has certainly been busy during the first quarter of 2026, and she went on to provide the Board with an update on the judicial side of operations today.

- Technology:

    - CALJ Covey began her report by citing Executive Director Brown's report in that the UIAB continues to focus on technological changes and upgrades at the Board. As was previously stated throughout all ongoing tech changes, the focus on the judicial side has continued to be on finding ways to increase hearing and appeal throughput, decrease the current backlog, and shorten the length of time it currently takes to work cases through the UIAB system.

    - The most direct way this challenge continues to be addressed is through increased staffing.

- Judicial Staffing:

    - In January of this year, the UIAB began its most recent recruitment. That finished in March, and 8 new ALJs have been hired in various offices across the state. The new ALJs started last Thursday and began their intensive training course this week. Principal ALJ and training coordinator, Alison Ferrara, is leading a team of phenomenal trainers, including Principal ALJs Justin Denton, and Lauren Chatterton, Senior ALJs Alex Slichko, Allison Schwier, Toyin Akinrolabu, Sarah Bierley, Seeta Persaud, and Will Friedman, ALJs Alexis Gordon, Katrina Norris-Taylor, Ijeoma Oduro-Ayisi, Stephanie Huffnagle, and Dasha Kabakova, BSA Team members Gerrad Bohl and Nastassia Trip, and administrative staff member Patrick McCabe who will train our new judges on our law, hearing practices, and technology. The new ALJs will complete the training program and begin holding hearings on June 22nd. Covey stated a big thank you to all UIAB staff who will be helping to bring these new hires up to speed. This shows that it really does take a village.

    - The UIAB is also implementing other initiatives at both the lower and higher authority to increase decision output and decrease the amount of data that will need to be migrated when the new computer system goes live.

    - At the lower authority, staff is conducting an administrative audit of inventory by scheduling all cases over a two-week period for brief hearings to take appearances and determine current active case load. CALJ Covey added that a significant percentage of parties ask for hearings and then do not appear at the hearing once it is scheduled. This, along with lower authority staffing levels, creates a bottleneck in the processing of cases with parties wishing to go forward, and has created a challenge in determining how to properly utilize our staff. The push will allow the team to focus on active matters and should decrease the number of hearing files that will need to be migrated to the new system when it goes live.

    - CALJ Covey continued by stating that at the higher authority, there is a newly created SharePoint hub for the electronic transmission of cases for member review and comment, the details of which will be presented in a training session after today's meeting. And, in line with Governor Hochul's EXPRESS NY initiative (which stands for Expediting Processes and Regulations to Enable Streamlined Services), Covey and the UIAB team is evaluating the internal procedures and review process in conjunction with

USDOL requirements to streamline and speed up the appeal review. CALJ Covey said that she remains hopeful that through both initiatives, the UIAB will quickly see a significant reduction in inventory while still maintaining a strong commitment to due process and exceptional quality of work.

- The UIAB is also currently engaged in another pilot project in which evening hearing times have been added to improve customer service. Lower authority hearings typically start between the hours of 8 a.m. and 2 p.m. The judicial team recognized that some claimants have difficulty reporting to hearings during normal working hours because they've obtained other employment after filing their claim. There are also some hearings with employers and claimants located on the West Coast that would benefit from later start times. Beginning March 30, 2026, and lasting through June 30, 2026, UIAB added a new 11:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. "shift" for evening hearings on Mondays and Tuesdays each week with the last hearing beginning at 6 p.m. At the end of the pilot, Covey and her team will evaluate its success by looking at how these additional hearing slots were utilized, party and judicial interest in shift expansion, and overall participation rate. If successful, the plan is to institutionalize this expansion of hours.

- CALJ Covey added that the success of these projects is due to the continued dedication, flexibility, and hard work of both the judicial and administrative staff. It has been a very busy year, and they all deserve kudos for how much they are accomplishing.

- QA/FQR:

  - Continuing her report, Covey stated that the UIAB continues to excel in the Federal Quarterly Reviews. For the fourth quarter of 2025, UIAB had an average score of 98.44%. FQR audits for the fourth quarter of 2025 are currently underway, which CALJ Covey will report on at our July meeting.

- Statistics:

  - CALJ Covey reported that while the quality remains high, UIAB is still not meeting USDOL acceptable level of performance markers at the lower authority. This is due to the current backlog, and she expressed the hope that there will be significant movement in this over the next quarter. Validated data shows that the average case age for the lower authority for March was 49, a slight decrease from Covey's last report. At the higher authority, the average case age for March was 78 days.

CALJ Covey conclude her report by stating that the UIAB is off to an amazing start in 2026. 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. This concluded CALJ Covey's report.

- Chair Reilly asked for questions or comments.

  - Board Chair Reilly appreciated that CALJ Covey's report identified all of the trainers by name, stating that UIAB's employees are second to none. They do the work with allegiance to due process, customer service, and to New York State. This, remarked Reilly, is a credit to Coveys leadership.

- Chair Reilly added that some of the mentioned initiatives will directly impact the Board and promises to streamline the work in a vey positive way. She added that once again, the UIAB quality review reports at 98 percent is exceptional. Reilly thanked CALJ Covey.

- Member Randall Douglas commented that the extended hours for hearings is a great idea.

- CALJ Covey added that a lot of outreach has been done to let people know about this initiative. Additionally, it is posted to the UIAB website, and a request was made to research and statistics to run the zip codes for all parties for the current inventory and anyone on the west coast. Research and Statistics did send that list, so that those west coast hearings can also be scheduled.

- Chair Reilly commented that the pilot will hopefully be good and the Board expects to hear about its success from CALJ Covey at the July meeting.

- Member Marilyn O'Mara moved to accept the report into the record. Member June O'Neill seconded. The report was unanimously accepted into the record.

- **Principal ALJ Report – Catherine Adlerman**

  - Acting Principal ALJ Catherine Adlerman discussed three recent Appellate Division cases affirmed by the Court:

    - *Matter of Korotkaya* (Commissioner of Labor) CV-25-0249 April 9, 2026

    - *Matter of Highgate Hotels, L.P.* (Commissioner of Labor) CV-24_1933 March 26, 2026

    - *Matter of Goods* (Commissioner of Labor) CV-24-1683 March 26, 2026

  - Chair Reilly asked for questions or comments.

  - Chair Reilly thanked PALJ Adlerman, stating that the decisions she presented are fascinating and were made very clear for the Board.

  - A Motion to accept and incorporate the report into the record was made by Member Randall Douglas and Member Marilyn 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 Randall Douglas 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: 29 a.m.

Submitted by Leighann Brown with the assistance of Heidi Packard

DRAFT