

Americans with Disability Advisory Council (ADAAC) Minutes

Date: September 4th, 2026
Time: 1 p.m.
Location: ADA Coordinator's Office via Zoom

Council Members Present:

Manuel Baca, Chair
Katherine O'Neal
Elijah Valdez
Carolyn Tanaka

City Staff Present:

Ernest Apodaca, Administrative Assistant
Amanda Trujillo, Executive Assistant

City Contractors Present:

Two ASL Interpreters

Council Members Not Present:

Corina Gutierrez

Public Attendees Present:

Cody Unser

Call to Order: By Chair Manuel Baca at 1:03 p.m.

Approval of Agenda: Motion to approve by Member Valdez. Chair Baca made a second. A roll call vote was taken. Member O'Neal voted to approve. Member Tanaka voted against approval. The agenda was approved with three votes in favor and one opposed (3-1).

Approval of Minutes from August 7th, 2026: Motion to approve by Chair Baca. Member O'Neal seconded. Member Valdez voted to approve. Member Tanaka voted against approval. The Minutes were approved with three votes in favor and one opposed (3-1).

Public Comment: No public comment was received. Chair Baca introduced Cody Unser, a member of the public who briefly introduced herself. She stated that she has been paralyzed for approximately 28 years and has been a longstanding disability advocate. She was attending the meeting to observe the Council's proceedings.

Discussion – APD Shootings of Individuals with Mental Health Conditions:

Chair Baca introduced the item, which had been placed on the agenda by Member O'Neal, and asked her to lead the discussion.

Member O'Neal presented her research and framed the issue:

- She reported that the City has directed substantial funding toward police retraining over several years without corresponding investment in mental health services. She stated that local psychiatric hospitals and crisis centers typically hold individuals for three to seven days, which she said is generally insufficient, leaving individuals who contact 311, 911, or 988 without an adequate place to stabilize. She recommended that the City redirect funding toward mental health services, including school counselors, services for unhoused residents, peer-led programs such as SMART Recovery that incorporate cognitive behavioral therapy, and transportation to those services. She stated that increased investment in prevention

could reduce the City's exposure to multi-million-dollar lawsuits related to police shootings. She also reported that she had been unable to obtain information from the City Council regarding how existing funds are being spent.

Member Valdez discussed service capacity and barriers to mental health access for the Deaf community:

- He noted that the City-funded wraparound clinic lacks sufficient staffing, including case managers, therapists, and psychiatrists. Drawing on his experience as a case manager, he cited caseloads of approximately 40 clients and identified staff burnout as a barrier to retention and comprehensive care.
- He also highlighted limited ASL-accessible mental health services in New Mexico, noting that, to his knowledge, only approximately three therapists statewide are ASL-fluent, accept Medicaid, provide therapy, and are trauma-informed. He stated that one provides only couples therapy and that he was not aware of any psychiatrists providing services directly in ASL.

Chair Baca addressed the crisis response structure and his own experience:

- He stated that Albuquerque Community Safety (ACS) was created to respond to individuals experiencing mental health crises, but that when a weapon is involved, only police are dispatched, which he said leaves no responder present who is specifically trained in de-escalation. He characterized this as a planning and organizational failure. He expressed the view that officers who shoot an individual with a mental health disability without justifiable cause, when the incident is captured on video, should be terminated and lose their certification. He further stated that the Council should urge the Mayor and City Council to prioritize these issues over beautification projects, art installations, trails, and similar expenditures.
- He also described his own experience in detention. He stated that, after having an episode, he was transported to UNM Hospital and evaluated by a healthcare provider who was not the appropriate type of specialist for the reported concerns. He said the experience demonstrated, in his view, that MDC is not adequately equipped to serve individuals experiencing a mental health crisis.

Member O'Neal stated that in her 17 years of practicing disability law, she had not encountered a client with a serious physical disability who did not also experience some form of mental health condition. She stated that the Council can serve as an advocate on integrated mental health resources and disability rights policy across municipal programs.

Action: Chair Baca asked each member to contact the City Councilor representing their district to discuss the issue and explore opportunities to work with the Council on it. Chair Baca stated that he would also contact his district Councilor and the Councilor's assistant to determine what the City is currently doing on the issue and to seek a meeting with Council members. No motion was made, and no vote was taken.

Council Membership and Terms:

- Chair Baca reported that three new applications had been received and that the Council expects to reach full membership shortly. Member Gutierrez has reapplied, as her current term ends in October; she had been serving the unexpired portion of a previous member's term. Member Tanaka's term also ends in October, on October 30. It was confirmed that Council terms are two years in length.

Old Business: No old business was raised.

New Business: No new business was raised.

Adjournment: Chair Baca adjourned the meeting at 1:23 p.m.

Next Regularly Scheduled ADA Advisory Council Meeting: Friday, October 2nd, 2026, at 1 p.m.