

**MINUTES OF THE  
MARYLAND STEM CELL RESEARCH COMMISSION**  
Monday, November 3, 2025  
(Virtual Meeting)

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**Members:**

Scott Bailey, Vice Chair  
Rachel Brewster, Chair  
Margaret Conn Himelfarb  
Christopher Dreisbach  
Mamta Gautam-Basak  
Diane Hoffmann  
Linda Powers  
Alan Regenberg  
Avram Reisner  
Ira Schwartz  
David Valle  
Curt Van Tassell

**Staff:**

Ruchika Nijhara, MSCRF  
Ben Antebi, MSCRF  
Sabrina Spinner, MSCRF

**Guests:**

Abi Kulshreshtha, MII  
Renee Winsky, MII

The Commission meeting was called to order at 2:02 p.m.

The Commission welcomed and introduced new Commission Members:

- Mr. Alan Regenberg, the Director of Outreach & Research Support & Research Associate at the Johns Hopkins Berman Institute of Bioethics. Mr. Regenberg has been appointed by Johns Hopkins to fill the bioethics seat on the Commission.
- Dr. David Valle, a Professor at the McKusick-Nathans Department of Genetic Medicine at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. Dr. Valle has been appointed by Johns Hopkins to fill the scientist seat on the Commission.

**I. Approval of Meeting Minutes**

The Commission reviewed the minutes from the September 17, 2025 meeting. A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes as submitted. The motion passed (10 approved – 2 abstentions)

**II. Maryland Innovation Initiative (MII) Presentation**

Ms. Renee Winsky, Chair, MII program, and Dr. Abi Kulshreshtha, Executive Director, MII program, both provided a general overview of the initiative and discussed current program activities, increased application volume, funding structure, collaborative relationships (TEDCO & participating institutions) and evolving operational/strategic priorities.

### III. Executive Director Report

Dr. Ruchika Nijhara presented the Executive Director's Report, which focused on the following:

**A. FY'26 Award Stats (R1 Cycle)**

An overview of funding rates and application trends across fiscal years was presented, noting a significant increase in demand for program funding. FY'26 (R1) data reflects continued and substantial growth in application volume and requested funding totals compared to prior fiscal years. For this cycle, 58 applications were submitted, requesting approximately \$21.7 million in funding.

**B. Outreach and program visibility:**

Dr. Nijhara shared recent outreach efforts focused on increasing program visibility and keeping the research community and companies across the state informed about opportunities and achievements. Efforts included digital newsletters and award announcement press releases. Social media engagement, particularly LinkedIn, was also expanded to connect with the stem cell medicine community and other stakeholders.

**C. Events:**

The 2nd Annual Stem Cell Symposium & Workshop was held on October 16–17, 2025, and was co-hosted by MSCRF, Johns Hopkins University, and the University of Maryland School of Medicine. The two-day event featured distinguished keynote speakers, including several state legislators who demonstrated strong support for the program. The first day focused on sickle cell disease and included scientific presentations on emerging treatments, including one from MSCRF-funded Dr. Brodsky's haploidentical stem cell transplant procedure followed by a powerful patient presentation from an individual successfully cured using this approach. The second day showcased results from MSCRF-funded research through poster and oral presentations, providing a valuable platform for academic researchers to connect, and fostering collaboration across the scientific research ecosystem.

MSCRF hosted two panel sessions at the TEDCO Entrepreneur EXPO Conference on October 21, 2025. The sessions featured MSCRF-funded leaders in stem cell and regenerative medicine, highlighting innovative technologies advancing through clinical development and examining the role and impact of artificial intelligence in stem cell medicine. Together, the sessions fostered meaningful dialogue and created opportunities for collaboration.

**D. R2 2026 Funding Cycle Timeline**

- Round 2 (R2) 2026 RFAs will be released for all funding programs within the next week and will be accessible online through the MSCRF website.
- The application deadline is January 12, 2026
- The Peer Review meeting is scheduled March 22-27, 2026
- The Commission Review meeting is scheduled for May 12, 2026.

**E. FY27 Budget planning and upcoming legislative meetings**

Dr. Rachel Brewster attended the Legislative Advisory Committee meeting with TEDCO on behalf of the Commission and the Fund. The committee discussed the schedule for the upcoming meetings in 2026 and addressed the Fund's request to restore its budget to \$20.5 million. Since the meeting, no response has been received from the Governor's office regarding the Commission's request, and the outcome will depend on the Governor's budget announcement in January 2026. Dr. Nijhara and Dr. Brewster will keep the Commission informed.

#### **IV. Statement for Closing the Meeting**

A motion was made and seconded that the Commission go into closed session. The motion stated the following:

#### **STATUTORY AUTHORITY TO CLOSE SESSION**

##### **General Provisions Article §3-103(a)(1)(i):**

This subtitle does not apply to ... a public body when it is carrying out ... an administrative function.

##### **TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED:**

The discussion will concern a review of operational and related considerations impacting the administration of MSCRF.

##### **REASONS FOR CLOSING:**

The Commission believes that the aforementioned administrative matters do not fall within the scope of coverage of the Open Meetings Act.

The motion passed unanimously. The Commission went into a closed session at 3:05 p.m., with only the Commission members and staff remaining in attendance.

##### **TOPICS DISCUSSED:**

The Commission discussed the possible formation of working groups and possible changes to its website.

##### **ACTIONS TAKEN:**

The Commission determined to discuss the aforementioned topics further at a future meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.