



**DRAFT**

Orange County Domestic Violence Commission Meeting Minutes  
**October 21, 2019 | 8:30 a.m. | Meeting Notes**

**Attendees:**

Honorable Jerry L. Demings, Orange County Mayor

**Co-Chairs:**

Honorable Alice Blackwell, Administrative Circuit Judge, Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida, Co-Chair

Dick Batchelor, President, Dick Batchelor Management Group, Inc., Co-Chair

**Members:**

Lisa Alexander, Survivor & Founder of Stand Up Survivor, Inc.

Honorable Aramis Ayala, State Attorney, Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida

Jay Corzine, Ph.D., Department of Sociology, University of Central Florida

Joellen Revell on behalf of Lui Damiani, Executive Director, Victim Service Center of Central Florida, Inc.

Gerry Glynn, Chief Legal Officer, Embrace Families

Honorable Alicia Latimore, Circuit Judge, Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida

Diana Mejia, Founder & President, Nuevo Sendero, Inc.

John Mina, Orange County Sheriff, Orange County Sheriff's Office

Honorable Tiffany Moore Russell, Orange County Clerk of Courts

Honorable Donald Myers, Chief Judge, Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida

Tekoa Pouerie, Director Center Advancement, Pace Center for Girls

Louis Quinones, Chief of Corrections, Orange County Corrections Department

Monica Rodríguez, Survivor

Deputy Chief Jose Velez on behalf of Orlando Rolon, City of Orlando Chief of Police, Orlando Police Department

Michelle Sperzel, Chief Executive Officer, Harbor House of Central Florida

Attorney Lydia Labar on behalf of Honorable Robert Wesley, Public Defender, Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida

Tekoa Pouerie, Director Center Advancement, Pace Center for Girls

The Domestic Violence Commission Meeting opened at 8:40 a.m.



### **Opening Remarks:**

**Mayor Demings:** Mayor Demings welcomed everyone to the Domestic Violence Commission meeting. Stakeholders have a vested interest in reducing domestic violence within our community, so we're reconvening the Domestic Violence Commission. It is a pleasure to announce that it will be co-chaired by Mr. Dick Batchelor and Judge Alice Blackwell.

Mayor Demings said Judge Blackwell and Mr. Batchelor have agreed to co-chair the work of commission. The co-chairs along with fellow commission members in this room will serve in an advisory capacity to assess any gaps in services, identify significant issues and recommend solutions that will ultimately help us reduce the incidents of DV in our county.

For the first time in the history of this commission, Mayor Demings said he has appointed several survivors to sit on commission – survivors are vital to the process and viable to commission. The Mayor said he wants to make sure their voice is heard and their needs are reflected in the solutions brought forward. Mayor Demings said that he looks forward to receiving the feedback and recommendations on this issue that deeply affects our community.

### **Welcome and Introductions:**

**Mr. Batchelor:** Mr. Batchelor said that he appreciates the leadership of Mayor Demings. He welcomed the survivors sitting on the commission; that they bring a new perspective to the commission.

**Judge Blackwell:** Judge Blackwell thanked those serving on the commission, and looks forward to hearing the ideas, viewpoints and perspectives on domestic violence and what needs to be done. Judge Blackwell said that first we're going to hear today from some of the agencies that touch most directly the families that are impacted by domestic violence. The judge asked each of the commission members to come with their ideas, that they will be recorded and will send them out so that everyone will have a record of them. Judge Blackwell stated that this is not a commission that's going to just come up with ideas, and not be involved in implementing them.

### **Policy Update:**

**Chief Judge Myers:** Chief Myers thanked Mayor Demings for his vision to reinstate the commission. He thanked the co-chairs for their commitment to this issue. That it takes champions to make a difference in the community and thanked them for their tireless work.



Chief Myers gave a history of the past domestic violence commissions; that more than 60 recommendations were produced for improvement to victim's services in domestic violence. Chief Myers provided some statistics on domestic violence incidences and said that recently there has been a lot of news about the inappropriate and deadly use of guns in domestic violence cases. He stated that Florida law is clear when a person is subject to a domestic violence injunction or an injunction for stalking or cyber-stalking, that person may not possess or control any firearm or ammunition. An injunction is a civil order from the court directing an abuser to stay away from a victim and to have absolutely no contact whatsoever with the victim usually for a defined period of time. That if the abuser has failed to follow the law, there is a new process to require the person to immediately turn in the weapons as well as to return to court within 24 hours to show proof of compliance with the law. If the abuser fails to return to court with proof, he or she will be arrested and brought to the court to appear before the judge to show why they failed to do what was required by the law. And they will be ordered to do so by the court. Chief Myers said that we will continue to seek new and improved ways to enforce the orders that are entered to protect domestic violence and stalking survivors.

### **Sunshine Law Training**

**Kathleen Latorre:** Ms. Latorre, Assistant County Attorney, presented a power point presentation on the Sunshine law regarding notice of committee meetings and having conversations between two or more commission members about domestic violence commission business, potential recommendations, policy is prohibited. Ms. Latorre said that she would put something in writing within the next week.

### **Harbor House of Central Florida Overview**

**Michelle Sperzel:** Ms. Sperzel gave an update on what Harbor House has accomplished, about the changes and new and enhanced programs. Harbor House changed their practice as far as they used to have advocates servicing everybody who was coming into the emergency shelter. They now have four specialized advocates that are case managers, and they are assigned to someone who is coming into the shelter. They do safety planning; do all of the assessments. One person has one advocate that they can go to instead of having to repeat their story over and over again.

Harbor House has expanded their economic justice program, expanded their shelter to have extended shelter stay. They are looking at additional housing partnerships and transitional house programs as well. They have expanded all youth programs. They now have two advocates that are trauma informed advocates that work with kids in their emergency shelter. Updated their



R3 training and have made it applicable to the local community and also looking at getting the R3 domestic violence 101 training into the hands of the people in the community.

Ms. Sperzel said that the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence is willing to do process mapping for the commission and would use one of their grants to pay for the process map. The suggestion is to start with the abuser first, then use the abuser map to create the survivor and family map. The process will allow the commission to identify gaps in services for families impacted by domestic violence.

### **Member Suggestions and Recommendations:**

**Judge Blackwell:** Judge Blackwell asked that each commission member speak about how they are involved in domestic violence and suggestions for recommendations the commission ought to take into consideration.

**Monica Rodriguez:** Ms. Rodriguez spoke about the huge gap in language barriers, and immigration status for victims of domestic violence. That women are staying with their abuser because they don't have the financial funds to get away. The women do not want to go to the shelters because they are afraid immigration will come and get them.

**Gerry Glynn:** Mr. Glynn suggested the commission to take a deeper look at the interlock between citizens who come from other countries and how it impacts the response of the community and to the crimes that are committed in our community, and that the victims may not feel safe coming into the system because of their immigration status.

**Joellen Revell:** Ms. Revell said that it's important to consider how dual victimization in terms of sexual assault and domestic violence occur. Would like to consider awareness and prevention which is about boundaries, consent, understanding relationships, intimate partner issues so it can help individuals in terms of understanding what they want and what they don't want.

**Diana Mejia:** Ms. Mejia said the engaged collaboration is necessary to build communication to increase the awareness of domestic violence in Orange County. She is an advocate for change as a survivor. Also recommends training and case management for families and victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse from different cultural backgrounds, particularly with Hispanic women, men and children in Orange and Osceola County. Would like to see additional community resources.

**Dr. Corzine:** Dr. Corzine stated that it's important that we get a better understanding of the characteristics of domestic violence cases that are dropped, and also look at whether or not for



those cases that are dropped, does that make a difference in the likelihood that there's going to be repeat contacts with the law enforcement community. And related to that, although a very small percentage of domestic violence cases escalate to domestic violence homicide, it would be good if we could look at if there are characteristics at an earlier stage in the escalation process of domestic violence that are good predictors of eventually ending up in a very serious assault, one that would lead to hospitalization or death.

**Jose Velez:** Jose Velez said that at OPD they have a domestic violence response team, specifically trained officers. There are immigration, language and communication concerns and victims fear continuing with prosecution. It's important for law enforcement to work on preparing the case from the moment the call is received and prepare the case so it can be prosecuted without the need of the victim.

**Sheriff Mina:** Sheriff Mina said that the immigration piece is extremely important. There is a fear of coming forward because of the victim's immigration status so recommended that someone from this area be included in the committees. Sheriff recommended that the checklist – things needed to help with prosecution - for officers be updated and make sure it's part of the Criminal Justice Institute curriculum. Sheriff Mina said that many of the agencies need funding for what they do, and also recommends that the commission talk about resources to help the organizations operate. Also, the Sheriff suggested making recommendations to the legislators to see if there are any stricter laws that we can put into legislation as far as domestic violence abuse.

**Judge Latimore:** Judge Latimore said that it's important that the commission work on trying to break the generational cycle of domestic violence; that efforts be made to educate the community. It's important for members of the community to understand the effects on children who have witnessed domestic violence, or been themselves survivors of domestic violence. Judge Latimore said that many children leave the court having been victimized or traumatized by domestic violence and the court is not able to insist that they receive any services, and hopes that the commission will be able to work on a means for having authority to do that. Judge Latimore said that it is traumatic for children to come to court to testify and hopes that the commission will be able to speak more about the option of the Chapter 39 injunction proceedings to avoid having children come downtown to the domestic violence division. That with the Chapter 39 injunctions, DCF is already involved and better prepared to deal with children who might be witnesses in domestic violence cases. Pro se litigants are not familiar with the procedures; they come in on their own and bring their children to testify.

**Chief Myers:** Chief Myers said that Judge Latimore's point on pro se involvement is a significant one, and suggested that the commission look at the access to justice issue for both survivors as well as alleged abusers. It's an important benefit for making the system easier and more friendly



to navigate. Resources are needed to make sure that what we order folks to do is actually taking place.

**Clerk Russell:** Clerk Russell stated that one of the areas that the commission should look at is education for the public – what happens from the beginning to the end of the process. That education is important, making sure that everyone on the commission knows what happens from filing an injunction, making sure we have a seamless process for those who are encountering our system. The clerk’s office partners with the Mental Health Association and Clerk Russell believes there should be a partnership with the Mental Health Association and the commission. Clerk Russell also recommends that the commission look at access to justice and how the process works, making sure that the public understands what happens when they enter the building.

**Ms. Labar:** Ms. Labar said that the commission should look at understanding the statistics of young boys who are victims of domestic violence or observed domestic violence and potentially committing those types of crimes. Also, looking at the role that poverty plays in the interaction of all of these individuals. Mental health is also something that the Public Defender’s Office deals with on a large scale.

**Ms. Alexander:** Ms. Alexander is a survivor of domestic violence. Ms. Alexander stated that abusers should be held accountable for their actions and should be followed up on to make sure they have completed the batterers’ intervention program. Ms. Alexander is looking forward to sitting on the commission to bring her own personal experience and the experience of other survivors.

**Ms. Sperzel:** Ms. Sperzel said that the community needs to understand ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences), the full spectrum and package of it. Harbor House is looking at how Chapter 39 is understood or not understood here in our local community. They are starting with OPD and following what happens when DCF files a Chapter 39, what happens to it in the clerks, what happens to it as far as law enforcement is concerned. Ms. Sperzel said that the Fatality Review Committee is happening, as well as the Task Force and would like those folks to be involved so they can inform the commission.

**Chief Quinones:** Chief Quinones said that he supports the process map; that it is extremely important because as we may believe we know where the gaps are, but when we have a group of individuals that get together and say this is what we do and who is the hand-off person, we then identify that the hand-off is not a warm hand-off. It may be, here you go, and that process will identify those gaps.



**Judge Blackwell:** Judge Blackwell said that the suggestions will be sent to the commission members. At the next meeting, we'll talk about the general topics and discuss a committee structure. Judge Blackwell asked that the commission members look at the topics to see which is of interest.

The subcommittees suggested: Mapping, Process, ACE and Chapter 39.

Additional participation suggestions from the following organizations: PACE, UCF, DCF, Legal Aid, Mental Health Association and the Faith Community.

The Domestic Violence Commission Meeting concluded at 10:30 a.m.