

## NC Domestic Violence Commission Meeting Minutes

November 3, 2023

This Meeting was Conducted Remotely by Zoom

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**Ethics Statement:** The State Government Ethics Act mandates that, at the beginning of every meeting, the Chair remind all members of their duty to avoid any conflicts of interest and inquire as to whether any member knows of any conflict of interest or potential conflict with respect to matters to come before the Commission. If any member knows of a conflict of interest or potential conflict, please state it for the record.

**Members Present:** Deborah Weissman, Chair, Michelle Bardsley, Tiffany Bell, Shelby Benton (present for the first part of the meeting), Dr. Jada Brooks, April Burgess-Johnson, Kriquette Davis, Dr. Kim Eagle, Saira Estrada (joined after roll call), Karen Fairley, Carianne Fisher, Donovan Grant, the Honorable Steven Hollowell (joined after roll call), Cheryl Howell, the Honorable Nathaniel Knust, Kathleen Lockwood, Denise Mazza, TeAndra Miller, Krishana Polite, Dr. Angelia Riggsbee, Michelle Scott, Starleen Scott-Robbins, Sheriff Gregory Seabolt, Joetta Shepherd, the Honorable Christine Strader (joined after roll call), Sheriff Christopher Thomas, Caroline Valand, and Avis Watkins-Smith.

**Members Absent:** Cathy Cloninger, David Elliott, Jessica Englert, LaKiera Grimes, Holly Jones, Sarah Kirkman, Elizabeth Outten, Ricky Parks, Amy Vaughn-Jones, and Sarah Owens Weeks.

**DOA NC Council for Women & Youth Involvement Staff Present:** Danielle Carman, Jamie Davis, Lori Gerber, Harriet Lunsford, Lisa McLaughlin, Sandra Ross, Deborah Torres, and Angela Winston-Hill.

**Guests Present:** Michael Adams, Erin Blondel, Evin Grant, Julia Horrocks, Judith Johnson-Hostler, Angela Harper King, Wes Kyatt, Maggie Slocumb, Skye Sullivan, and Nisha Williams.

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**The meeting was called to order by Chair Weissman at 10:00 a.m.**

Welcome/Member Roll Call: Weissman welcomed everyone who was present and gave the ethics advisement.

Approval of Minutes: Scott-Robbins made a motion to approve the minutes of the August 18, 2023 meeting, and Miller seconded the motion. All members who were present at roll call approved the motion.

Oaths of Office: Hollowell administered oaths of office to reappointed members Benton, Brooks, Burgess-Johnson, Estrada, Fisher, Knust, Lockwood, Miller, Watkins-Smith, and Weissman, as well as newly appointed members Bardsley, Grant, and Scott. The oath of office for reappointed member Cathy Cloninger was postponed until the next meeting.

### **CFWYI Executive Director Report** – Danielle Carman

Carman directed the Commission members to a memo from her in their meeting materials. She said the final 2023 Appropriations Act became law without Governor Cooper's signature on October 3, 2023 and included the following new funding for CFWYI: 1) a \$500,000 recurring increase for both the Domestic Violence Center Fund and the Sexual Assault Center Fund in FY23-24 and a \$750,000 recurring increase for both in FY24-25; 2) \$450,000 recurring for two human trafficking positions (a Program Manager and Administrative Associate) and operations; 3) \$108,483 recurring to increase the summer internship pay rate from \$12 to \$15 per hour; 4) \$20,000 recurring for American Sign Language interpreters for Domestic Violence Commission and Council for Women meetings; and 5) \$25,000 recurring for maintenance and support of CFWYI's online EBS grants management system.

Carman said CFWYI accepted FY23-25 eligibility applications for state grants via the EBS system and is in the process of executing contracts and approving grantee budgets. Based on the number of approved shares per funding stream, the FY23-24 per share grant amounts are: 1) \$60,972.19 for domestic violence programs; 2) \$32,704.03 for sexual assault dual programs; and 3) \$77,287.72 for sexual assault stand alone programs. Domestic violence grantees also receive shares of marriage license fee and divorce filing fee collections.

Carman reviewed some statistics that state grantees reported for FY22-23 services, including pie charts showing demographic data for clients served. She also announced some staffing changes since the last Commission meeting, including Lisa McLaughlin joining the team in August as the Eastern Region Director and Jean McBride accepting an offer to become a new Youth Program Coordinator.

### **Chair Report** – Deborah Weissman

Weissman said she had recently convened a meeting of all committee chairs. The group discussed the way forward for the Transportation Committee and agreed to change the name to the Access to Transportation and Broadband Committee. Weissman said the group also discussed the availability of financial resources to support committee work and noted that Commissioners are all volunteers and there are no sources of funding for the committees. Weissman said the Commission does not have the bandwidth to apply for and monitor grants. As a result, she suggested that committees seek partnerships with organizations that are doing related work and might be able to provide some resources, such as the Victim Service Committee's partnership with the Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Weissman added that the North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCCADV) recently received a grant from the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) to conduct a needs assessment with the Deaf/DeafBlind/Hard of Hearing (D/DB/HH) community and, as NCCADV's goals overlap with the committee's work, it is possible that some tasks that require funding could be handled by NCCADV.

Weissman said the chairs discussed how the Commission could position itself to be seen as more of a resource for legislators. She said the Commission's enabling statute tasks it with developing legislative recommendations to prevent domestic violence and serve survivors, and the Commission will continue to strive to meet that charge. To help meet that goal, the chairs discussed holding a meeting at the General Assembly so that legislators could choose to attend and participate. However, the chairs think it would be best if the Commission had an invitation from a legislator to do so. She said the chairs further agreed that the Commission needs to build a foundation for that by building relationships with legislators. She suggested that individual Commissioners consider contacting legislators to introduce themselves, tell them what committee they serve on and its mission, and ask if the Commission can be of any assistance to them in any matter including assessing the impact of draft legislation. Weissman offered to create a template of talking points if it would be helpful. Grant said a template would be helpful, and Weissman said she would draft something. Weissman asked any Commissioners who contact legislators to bring back to the Commission any feedback or suggestions they receive.

Weissman said the final issue the chairs discussed was the possibility of adding a specific substantive topic for discussion to each quarterly agenda that is either outside of the committee work or relevant to all committees. She said the topics could include issues such as emerging research and new challenges. She asked Commission members to share any suggested topics they may have with Carman and her.

### **Committee Reports**

#### **Access to Health Services Committee Report** – Starleen Scott-Robbins and Dr. Jada Brooks, Co-Chairs

Scott-Robbins said the committee's focus is on promoting increased routine screening for intimate partner violence (IPV) by primary care providers, especially in rural areas. She said the committee is working to collaborate with the North Carolina Community Health Center Association, which represents 43 federally qualified health centers across the state, to offer universal education and screening for IPV, technical assistance, and consultation. Scott-Robbins said committee members recently met with representatives of the association and have a firm commitment that they want to move forward on this project. Because Medicaid expansion will keep them busy for the next several months, the plan is to move forward with this collaboration at the beginning of FY24-25 in July.

In the meantime, the committee has begun conversations about drafting a proposal for a project based on the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) "Prevent, Assess, and Respond" toolkit for health centers and domestic violence programs. This toolkit provides the components that are needed to implement universal education and/or screening in a healthcare setting. The committee plans to develop a draft outline to share with the association by January 2024 for feedback and input. Weissman asked if part of the screening will include traumatic brain injuries (TBIs), and Scott-Robbins said she can check. She added that the committee's review so far has been focused on the structure of how to implement screening and education within a health center, not the substance of the recommended screening and training.

#### **Access to Transportation and Broadband Committee Report** – Kriquette Davis and Carianne Fisher, Co-Chairs

Davis said the committee sponsored a wonderful lunch and learn earlier in the year and has done other great work, but recently seems to have lost its momentum. She said the plan is to shift the focus to broadband issues, and she invited new members to join the committee for that effort. Davis said it will be important to support the current administration's state-level efforts. Weissman said state efforts with broadband need to be informed by domestic violence concerns and interests, and she invited any Commissioner who does not have a committee assignment or who would prefer to change their committee assignment to consider joining the committee.

#### **Domestic Violence Offender Management Committee Report** – Tiffany Bell, Chair

Bell said the committee is focused on updating the state administrative code provisions about Domestic Violence Intervention Programs (DVIPs) and is working with North Carolina Providers of Abuser Treatment (NCPAT) to revise CFWYI's best practice guidelines. She said the committee will also work with Weissman and UNC Project RESTART to identify evaluation measures.

Grant said NCPAT has gone through the guidelines and is combining its members' comments. Grant noted that NCPAT is a membership organization of people who do DVIP work or have an interest in working with offenders, and he currently serves as chair. They have quarterly meetings to get updates from the DVOM committee and to share struggles and achievements, as well as support each other, and they host an annual conference. Grant said the organization also looks at innovative programming and brings in people to share knowledge and strategies. Weissman said UNC Project RESTART is a collaborative research project that includes both the law school and the school of public health and is looking at research on updated DVIP practices and potential code revisions. She added that the project is incorporating the expertise of committee members who work with offenders.

### Victim Services Committee Report – Danielle Carman (designee)

Committee Chair Benton had to leave the meeting early, so Carman gave the committee report in her absence. Carman said the committee has been focusing its work on the D/DB/HH population, and has sponsored a series of virtual lunch and learns to educate domestic violence, sexual assault, and DVIP providers on meaningful access and communications equity, as well as D/DB/HH providers on the needs of survivors.

Carman said the committee hopes to provide support for NCCADV's ongoing work on a needs assessment for the D/DB/HH population, in addition to its own work on capacity building for this marginalized population. Simultaneously, the committee is considering the next marginalized population on which to focus. Carman said the committee has discussed a series of options, including Teens, American Indians, LBGQ, Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming, African Black/Caribbean Black, Male Survivors, Elderly, and Criminalized Survivors. They plan to discuss those options and determine their next focus at the November 21, 2023 committee meeting. Carman said she expects the committee members to identify and recruit members of the selected population to be part of the work moving forward.

Carman said Benton is always looking for additional members to serve on the committee and she invited anyone who is interested to reach out to Benton or her.

### Legislative and Advocacy Committee Report – Kathleen Lockwood, Co-Chair

Lockwood said the FY23-25 base budget had been finalized since the last Commission meeting and the committee report summarizes the domestic violence related funding increases, including the recurring increase for domestic violence service providers. She said the state coalitions had asked for larger non-recurring increases to help cover the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) cuts, but they are grateful for the increases that were included. Lockwood directed the Commissioners to a chart in the committee report showing the portion of North Carolina's VOCA allocation that was available for subawards each fiscal year since federal FY12-13. She said the allocation has declined significantly since its high of \$100.5 million in FY17-18 to \$40.4 million in FY22-23, and is projected to decrease again to less than \$24 million in FY23-24. Lockwood said that is problematic because it is the primary funding source that domestic violence service providers use for staff and overhead expenses.

Lockwood said the programs are at a point of real crisis. She noted that there is a chance that the federal budget for the current fiscal year will include non-recurring money to replenish the fund, but that does not look likely. She added that the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) is holding a national call-in day on November 8<sup>th</sup> and is encouraging people to contact their Representatives and Senators about the devastating impact of another 40% VOCA cut. Lockwood said she would circulate a NNEDV toolkit to the Commissioners.

Lockwood added that the committee also discussed data on domestic violence-related homicides in North Carolina, noting that there had been 59 such homicides in 2023 through October 4<sup>th</sup>, which exceeded the 47 homicides in 2022.

Burgess-Johnson thanked everyone in advance for their advocacy to fill the VOCA gap. She said she leads one of the older and more stable domestic violence programs in the western part of the state and their best-case scenario is losing more than 20% of their general operating budget due to the VOCA cuts. She said that level of cut will translate into hundreds of survivors not receiving needed services and could decimate smaller programs. Horrocks said legal services organizations are facing similar cuts, and noted that Pisgah Legal Services is not filling vacancies and decreasing staff and services. Bell said she is very concerned about the impact on victims and added that the Governor's Crime Commission is also funding fewer DVIPs. Weissman said the cuts are alarming, and asked anyone who becomes aware of any new funding streams to let the Commission know.

Valand said the Governor is considering proposing some type of fill-in funding in his next budget proposal, adding that several other states have taken action to plug the holes with state appropriations. She encouraged local service providers to talk to their elected officials at both the state and federal levels about the impact of the cuts on their staffing and service levels.

**Guest Presentation: Alamance County Domestic Violence Fatality Reviews 2022-2023**

Sullivan, Director of the Family Justice Center of Alamance County, gave a PowerPoint presentation on Alamance County Domestic Violence Fatality Reviews in FY22-23. That report is on file with the Council for Women and Youth Involvement. Sullivan reviewed data on domestic violence homicides in Alamance County since 2003, as well as the findings and recommendations of the local fatality review team.

**Next Steps** – Deborah Weissman

Weissman informed the Commission that the 2024 quarterly meetings would be held on the following dates:

- Friday, March 1, 2024
- Friday, May 17, 2024
- Friday, September 27, 2024
- Friday, December 6, 2024

Weissman said Carman would send calendar holds for those dates.

**Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 12:20 pm.

**Next Meeting**

March 1, 2024