

NC Domestic Violence Commission Meeting Minutes

December 6, 2024

This Meeting was Conducted Remotely by ZoomGov

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 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, Dr. Jada Brooks, April Burgess-Johnson, Kathy Current (joined after roll call), Dr. Kim Eagle, Saira Estrada, Carianne Fisher, Donovan Grant, Holly Jones, Sarah Kirkman (joined after roll call), the Honorable Nathaniel Knust, Tracy Lee, Denise Mazza, TeAndra Miller, Steven Nunn, Michelle Scott, Starleen Scott-Robbins, Joetta Shepherd, the Honorable Christine Strader (joined after roll call), Caroline Valand, Avis Watkins-Smith, the Honorable W. Eric Whitten, and George Wilson.

Members Absent: Shelby Benton, Brittany Bromell, Cathy Cloninger, Kriquette Davis, David Elliott, Jessica Englert, Karen Fairley, LaKiera Grimes, the Honorable Steven Hollowell, Kathleen Lockwood, Elizabeth Outten, Krishana Polite, and Dr. Angelia Riggsbee.

NC Council for Women & Youth Involvement Staff Present: Stephanie Judith Batista, Jessica Benson, K. Lenore Brown, Danielle Carman, Jamie Davis, Lori Gerber, Harriet Lunsford, Lisa McLaughlin, Charnessa Ridley, Sandra Ross, Bernetta Thigpen, and Angela Winston-Hill.

Guests Present: Halley Dannemiller, Liz Doherty, Jordan Ethers, Chrissy Griffin, Mariah Harrelson, Julia Horrocks, Judith Johnson Hostler, Maggie Slocumb, Skye Sullivan, and Kaliah Thompson.

The meeting was called to order by Chair Weissman at 10:05 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 September 27, 2024 meeting, and Bardsley seconded the motion. All members who were present at roll call approved the motion.

Oaths of Office: Knust administered oaths of office for reappointed members Bell and Kirkman. The oaths of office for members Grimes, Riggsbee, and Strader were postponed until the next meeting.

Chairperson's Report

Weissman noted that the state has faced a lot of challenges from Hurricane Helene, which was hitting western North Carolina during the last quarterly Commission meeting. She expressed concern for the providers serving domestic violence victims and offenders in the west, adding that funding is always a challenge for these programs but the hurricane caused widespread interruptions in services.

Weissman said there has been some significant media attention over the past few months about the more than 12,000 women who are incarcerated in the United States for homicide. She referenced a recent New York Times article on gender-based violence and women who kill in self-defense or defense of others. Weissman noted that the article described a study that could have a significant impact on legal principles around self-defense and how the courts might contextualize imminent danger when there has been ongoing violence. Weissman said the Commission has also previously discussed information about traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) in women who have been abused and are incarcerated. She said there is a clear relationship between brain injuries and criminality in victims who have been charged with or convicted of crimes.

Weissman said the Commission is well positioned to think about how it can contribute to addressing these issues. She noted that there would be presentations later in the agenda from advocates with important insights to share about domestic violence, including members of the Buncombe County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team and two law students in her criminalized survivors class.

Weissman asked Carman if she had anything to report. Carman said all cabinet agencies are working hard with Governor-elect Josh Stein's transition team. She added that, if DOA Secretary Pam Cashwell had been able to attend the meeting, she would have wanted to thank all Commissioners for their commitment to this important work.

Report of Domestic Violence Offender Management (DVOM) Committee

Bell said, at its last meeting, the Commission approved proposed changes to the Administrative Code that had been developed by the DVOM Committee. She said those proposed changes have been provided to DOA's General Counsel, and she is preparing them for "prereview" submission to the attorneys at the Office of Administrative Hearings' Rules Review Commission.

Bell said members of the DVOM Committee have also scheduled a meeting in January with representatives of the Department of Adult Correction to explore ways to collaborate on an ongoing basis around domestic violence offender programs in prisons. Weissman said a statute requiring collaboration around best practices for those programs recently came to the Commission's attention and she is excited to learn more.

Report of Access to Health Services Committee

Scott-Robbins said she has worked for DHHS' Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services since 1994 and will be officially retiring in early 2025. She added that her last physical day with the division will be December 20, 2024, so this will be her last Commission meeting. Scott-Robbins said she has served as the DHHS Secretary's designee on the Commission since 2018 and it has been quite an honor and a privilege to be part of such an incredible group of professionals who are committed to supporting domestic violence survivors. She thanked her committee co-chair, Brooks, and everyone on the Access to Health Services Committee who worked so hard to make its projects successful. She also thanked Thigpen for staffing the Committee and being its backbone of support.

Brooks thanked Scott-Robbins for her service. Brooks said the Committee's role is to promote increased routine screening for intimate partner violence by primary care providers, especially those in rural areas and with vulnerable populations. She said the Committee had rescheduled its planned lunch-and-learn for March

2025 and is working to design a promotional flyer. She added that the Committee is always recruiting new members and exploring ways to continue to grow its impact. Weissman thanked Scott-Robbins for her years of service, and numerous Commission members congratulated her on her retirement in the meeting chat.

Report of Victim Services Committee

Carman gave a brief report from the Victim Services Committee on behalf of Committee Chair Benton. Carman said, over the past six months, the Committee has been focused on raising awareness of domestic violence services for the marginalized population of teens. She said the Committee is continuing to seek out programs from across the state that are being used to educate or serve teens, and she encouraged anyone with information about teen programs to let Benton know.

Carman said the Committee recently turned its attention to a case study of one victim's experience seeking services from multiple local county providers in an effort to identify systemic pitfalls and best practices. She said the Committee members worked with NCCADV to ensure that the case summary does not include any details that could be used to identify the victim, and it started a discussion about the goals and objectives of this project at its November 2024 meeting. Carman said the Committee plans to continue that discussion at its December meeting, and she invited anyone who was interested in joining the Committee to contact Benton.

Report of Legislative & Advocacy Committee

Jones said there has not been a lot of recent activity at the General Assembly outside of disaster relief from Hurricane Helene. However, the Committee is continuing to discuss how to get its voice out there and advocate with NCCADV for a special allocation for victim service providers impacted by Helene. Jones said two hurricane relief bills have passed but they did not contain any appropriations for domestic violence services. The Senate has overridden a veto of a third bill that will be heard in the House next week, but it also does not contain funds for survivors.

Jones said the next legislative long session will start in early 2025. She noted that Committee co-chair Lockwood will be returning from parental leave in the new year, and she thanked Nisha Williams for all of the work she has done to keep the Committee informed in Lockwood's absence.

Guest Presentation: Buncombe County 2023 Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team Report

Horrocks and Slocumb gave a joint presentation on behalf of the Buncombe County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team. The Commission's meeting materials included a 2023 Domestic Violence Fatality Review Report—which included some county-specific data, the findings and recommendations stemming from an intensive two-day review of one domestic violence-related homicide case, and a three-year summary of common themes—and a PowerPoint titled "Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team Recommendations" dated June 18, 2024. The report and the PowerPoint are on file with CFWYI.

Weissman said very few counties have DVFRTs but the information they collect and analyze is so useful and relevant across the state. She asked Horrocks and Slocumb if there were any particular challenges in undertaking the review, and Horrocks said the process of getting a team organized and started can be challenging. She said, once you have the team members in a room together, everyone is so moved by the cases that they want to do the collaborative work. Slocumb agreed and said having consistency of leadership and attendance is helpful. She added that the statutory seats are almost all designated for specific roles, so it can also be challenging to have robust representation from the impacted communities.

Guest Presentation: Legislative Proposals to Address Criminalized Survivors

UNC Law students Dannemiller and Harrelson gave a PowerPoint presentation titled "Survivors of Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking in the Criminal Justice System," which is on file with CFWYI. Weissman

complimented them on their presentation and the impressive work they did on this topic throughout the semester.

Next Steps & Reminder of 2025 Meeting Dates

Weissman said the quarterly meetings in 2025 will be held on February 14, May 16, September 12, and November 14, 2025.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:30 pm.