

NC Domestic Violence Commission Meeting Minutes

February 14, 2025

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, Shelby Benton, Dr. Jada Brooks, April Burgess-Johnson, the Honorable Jean Marie Christy, Cathy Cloninger, Kathy Current (joined after roll call), Kriquette Davis, Liz Doherty, Dr. Kim Eagle, Saira Estrada, Carianne Fisher, Donovan Grant, LaKiera Grimes, Brittany Jones, the Honorable Sarah Kirkman, the Honorable Nathaniel Knust, Tracy Lee, Kathleen Lockwood, Denise Mazza, TeAndra Miller, Steven Nunn, Dr. Angelia Riggsbee, Joetta Shepherd, the Honorable Christine Strader, Noelle Talley, Caroline Valand, and George Wilson.

Members Absent: Tiffany Bell, Brittany Bromell, Lt. Gov. Rachel Hunt, Elizabeth Outten, Michelle Scott, Avis Watkins-Smith, and the Honorable W. Eric Whitten.

NC Council for Women & Youth Involvement Staff Present: Stephanie Judith Batista, Jessica Benson, K. Lenore, Brown, Danielle Carman, Jamie Davis, Lori Gerber, Charmyka Marrow, Lisa McLaughlin, Sarah Michael McNeese, Charnessa Ridley, Sandra Ross, and Angela Winston.

Guests Present: DOA Secretary Gabriel Esparza, DOA Policy Director Evin Grant, Stephanie Austin, Lindsey Bohan, Mona Evans, Angela Harper King, Julia Horrocks, Judith Johnson Hostler, Maggie Slocumb, Skye Sullivan, Maryjane Webb, and John Weil.

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. Esparza thanked the Commission members and CFWYI staff for their work on such important issues and commended them for bringing both their professional expertise and personal experiences to the table to advance the prevention of intimate partner violence. He said DOA performs a lot of important business functions for the state of North Carolina, but the work of the advocacy divisions are personal passion projects for him. Esparza spoke about his background growing up with a social worker for a mother and a psychologist for a father, as well as his experience serving on the board of a child advocacy center in Charlotte. He said he looks forward to becoming more involved with the work of the Commission. Weissman said the Commission is grateful for Esparza's support.

Approval of Minutes: Davis made a motion to approve the minutes of the December 4, 2024 meeting, and Riggsbee seconded the motion. All members who were present at roll call approved the motion, with Benton, Christy, Doherty, Grimes, Jones, Lockwood, Riggsbee, Strader, and Talley abstaining.

Oaths of Office: Knust administered oaths of office for reappointed members Grimes, Riggsbee, and Strader, and for newly appointed members Christy, Doherty, Jones, and Talley. The oath of office for Hunt was postponed until the next meeting.

Chairperson's Report

Weissman reminded the Commissioners to file their annual Statements of Economic Interest by the April 15th deadline and to check the Ethics Commission's website to determine if they are due for their ethics education.

Weissman said she has seen disturbing news accounts over the past few weeks about domestic violence-related homicides, including one incident in Raleigh where two people were killed and a law enforcement officer was critically injured. Weissman said the shooter was the victim's former husband, who was in possession of two guns despite having mental health issues. Weissman said many victims do not call the police for complicated reasons and she knows there is a need for additional funding for programs for survivors. However, while the narrative after many domestic violence related homicides is that a protective order cannot stop a gun, she wanted to speak about the value of DVPOs. Weissman said DVPOs cannot eliminate gender-based violence but they do reduce violent incidents. She added that judges entering DVPOs can provide affirmative relief and set conditions that protect victims, noting that, in one study, 86% of women said a DVPO either stopped or reduced their abuse.

Weissman thanked the new Commission members for joining and asked them to contact Carman about their preferred committee assignment if they have not already done so. Weissman said the real work of this Commission happens at the committee level and it is important for everyone to participate.

Executive Director's Report

Carman said CFWYI administers four different state grant funding streams, including appropriations from the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Center funds, and two sets of court fee collections (marriage license fees and divorce filing fees) that go to all grantees who receive Domestic Violence Center funds. She directed the Commissioners to a memo in their materials that showed this fiscal year's annual amounts per grantee share for each fund. Carman said, so far this fiscal year, CFWYI has distributed almost \$10.3 million across all four funding streams.

Carman said the division also administers the federal Family Violence and Prevention Act funds and, last week, it notified all applicants for federal FY24-25 FVPSA Core funds about the results of a recent competitive application process. CFWYI received 69 applications and awarded a total of 43 subgrants, including 35 subgrants for shelter services, seven subgrants for violence prevention programs, and one grant to NCCADV. The awards totaled \$3.72 million.

Carman said she is pleased to announce that CFWYI now has all existing FTEs filled, with no vacancies, although there are three staff members on temporary leave at this time. Carman added that the Commission's request for a new full-time Domestic Violence Intervention Program (DVIP) Coordinator was included in DOA's funding request to the Governor's Office for next fiscal year, although we do not yet know if there will be interest in funding that position.

Report of Access to Health Services Committee

Brooks said she is Co-Chair of the Health Services Committee, which focuses on promoting universal screening

for domestic violence by primary care providers, especially in rural areas of the state. Brooks said the Committee met in both January and February. At the time of the January meeting, the group was planning to host a lunch and learn on March 26th and discussed advertising strategies including flyer design. At the February meeting, the Committee decided to postpone the lunch and learn until April 23rd. Brooks said, at that meeting, the Committee also welcomed a newly appointed Commissioner, Brittany Jones.

Brooks said the Committee is also working with Weissman and her law students on a draft guide for interpersonal violence screening and assessment in relationship to traumatic brain injuries and said that guide is currently being reviewed by health care experts.

Report of Domestic Violence Offender Management (DVOM) Committee

Gerber gave the report of the DVOM Committee in Bell's absence. She said she is CFWYI's Western Region Director and part-time DVIP Coordinator. She said the Committee generated proposed revisions to the administrative code governing DVIPs, which the full Commission subsequently approved. Those rules have been provided to DOA's General Counsel who planned to submit them last week to the attorneys for the Rules Review Commission for pre-review. Gerber said DOA's General Counsel advised that it would likely take at least 30 days to hear back about the pre-review.

Gerber said representatives of the DVOM Committee had a very informative meeting that morning with representatives of the Department of Adult Correction (DAC) to discuss offender treatment programs for DAC inmates. She said the staff received 32 DVIP renewal applications and one new program application in the latest round. She added that North Carolina Providers of Abuser Treatment (NCPAT) has generously donated \$3,000 to DVIPs impacted by Hurricane Helene.

Report of Access to Transportation & Broadband Committee

Davis said the Transportation & Broadband Committee has not met in several months and she is trying to identify a new recurring date and time that works better for Committee members. She added that all of the Committee chairs will be meeting in March, and she hopes that meeting will help this Committee get back on track. Davis invited any Commissioners who were interested to join the Committee.

Report of Victim Services Committee

Benton said the Victim Services Committee's focus is on raising awareness for services for marginalized populations. She said the Committee has focused on language access and services for Deaf/DeafBlind/Hard of Hearing individuals and teens. Benton said a group of medical providers contacted Weissman last fall about a victim who had hit some barriers in receiving services from multiple providers and the Committee subsequently decided to focus on a redacted case study of her experience. Benton said the idea is to identify systemic gaps and best practices to address them. As part of that work, Benton said the Committee spent some time looking at the statutory powers and duties of the Commission. Weissman said that is a good reminder that the Commission is obligated by statute to fulfill certain obligations. She added that the real work of the Commission happens at the Committee level and she encouraged everyone to join and invest in a Committee.

Report of Legislative & Advocacy Committee

Lockwood said the Legislative & Advocacy Committee is a bit behind in developing a proposed legislative agenda for the current long session because she was out on maternity leave and the previous Committee Co-Chair, Holly Jones, is no longer serving on the Commission. She invited anyone who might be interested in serving as a new co-chair to contact her. Lockwood said the Committee will work on a proposed legislative agenda at its meeting the following week and may be asking the full Commission to vote remotely before the next Commission meeting. Lockwood provided a link to the [Commission's 2023 legislative agenda](#) in the

meeting chat, and said the Committee would also be discussing some proposals that Weissman's law students have generated to help criminalized survivors.

Guest Presentation: Empowering Women in Reentry and Redefining Rights

Weissman introduced Mona Evans as the Community Advocacy Director at [Benevolence Farm](#), which provides transitional housing and employment and wrap-around services for women after incarceration. Evans shared a PowerPoint presentation titled "Empowering Women in Reentry and Redefining Rights," which is on file with CFWYI.

Evans discussed the importance of trauma-informed gender responsive care for women who have been incarcerated, adding that many women in prison are survivors of domestic and sexual violence. She discussed the challenges women face when they return home from incarceration, including housing insecurity, affordable health care, family reunification and child custody, and substance misuse, adding that those challenges often drive women back to their abusers. Evans discussed the importance of former [Governor Cooper's Executive Order on reentry](#), which is aimed at improving reentry services and reducing barriers. She said the order includes a number of important provisions, such as support for employment after incarceration.

Evans reviewed the services provided at Benevolence Farm and the benefits from her experience as a resident there. Carman asked about Benevolence Farm's tiny house project, and Evans said the plan is to build seven tiny homes on the property for women in transition to live more independently than in the main house. Johnson Hostler asked about referrals for women with opioid use disorder, and Evans confirmed that such women would be eligible for services as long as they are in recovery. Lockwood asked how often Evans hears from women who have been incarcerated that their experience of violence is related to their incarceration, and whether she has advice for what domestic violence service providers could do differently to provide better services to those individuals. Evans said a lot of women who have been abused go through reentry programs and get housing and employment and then the support stops, and she thinks they often need more ongoing support and resources.

Weissman asked what suggestions Evans has in terms of reentry services before a survivor exits incarceration, and Evans said housing and family reunification. Sullivan said she is hearing about men who are reentering after incarceration, being located back into the homes of their victims, and then committing new acts of violence. Evans said that is an issue for a lot of women nationwide and there need to be some policy solutions. Weissman talked about current efforts to assist survivors who have committed crimes, including homicide, related to their experience of domestic violence and the ways that North Carolina laws could better address those issues.

Next Steps & Reminder of 2025 Meeting Dates

Weissman urged Commissioners to step up and participate in a Committee if they are not already doing so and asked them to contact Carman for more information about Committee service. Weissman said the Commission's remaining quarterly meetings for 2025 will be held on May 16, September 12, and November 14, 2025.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:10 pm.