

Alaska Criminal Justice Commission
Domestic Violence Workgroup

Meeting Summary

Wednesday, July 29, 2020, 10:00 a.m.

Via Zoom

Commissioners: Sean Case, Scotty Barr

Participants: Rhonda Street, Becky Tuominen, Diane Casto, Katie TePas, Brad Myrstol, Troy Payne, Tori Shanklin, Charlotte Rand, Kaci Schroeder

Staff: Staci Corey, Teri Carns, Barbara Dunham

Workgroup recommendation: Bail Conditions

Commission staff attorney Barbara Dunham had circulated a revised draft of this recommendation, with very few changes other than leaving it open as to whether the legislature or court system should enact this change, as well as the method to be used to make it more adaptable to different locations. APD Captain Sean Case, Commissioner and workgroup chair, asked whether there were any objections to sending this recommendation to the full Commission, and there were none.

Workgroup recommendation: Coordinated Community Response (CCR)

Barbara explained that she added a section at the end of the draft recommendation to reflect discussion from the previous meeting that participants thought that data collection was a key component of CCR teams.

Sean said he wanted to discuss victim access to law enforcement, the ease with which information gets to advocates, and the frequency with which advocates get involved. Connecting victims to advocates in the context of sexual assault was working well. This was not the case for other crimes, for which officers will give the victim a card with OVR's number and leave. APD has DV follow-up officers, who were at the meeting, and they are able to contact many of the victims, but they are not advocates. He wondered how to get victims connected to services, and whether advocates should be on call 24/7.

Diane Casto from the CDVSA said that right now most DV programs don't have enough advocates to cover all cases or to reach out to victims immediately. She agreed there was a need to have advocates be more easily accessible to victims, but that would need more resources. She noted that the CCR recommendation called to support and fund CCR teams.

Katie TePas from DPS said that for the troopers, the point of contact is the DV booklet—they read the booklet, and provide the victim with a contact number. They should always be referring a victim to a local agency that way. Echoing what Diane said about funding, she thought it was important to be thoughtful about resources and how to find something that works in rural and urban areas, where the nature of law enforcement contact would be different. She recalled there was a lot of discussion about having a 1-800 number during the previous administration.

Diane said that there had been a big push for that as part of the previous administration's Public Safety Action Plan, but there was pushback from local DV programs because their grants require having a local hotline. They were thinking of solutions but it was never funded before the administration ended. She added that there was also the issue of virtual or telephonic support; by necessity, DV programs have been doing much more virtually because of the pandemic. Before there might have been pushback on expanding virtual offerings that but now programs are discovering they have the ability to do that, although it might not be the best. She still believed having a 1-800-number would be beneficial.

Commissioner Scotty Barr asked how many DV programs were in rural communities; he knew they were in larger communities. He believed rural areas were seeing more and more cases because of a lack of law enforcement. DV can be worse in rural communities because they are remote and there is no road access, and it takes a day or two to fly out there, or more depending on weather.

Diane explained that CDVSA funds 26 DV programs around the state, which are mostly in hub communities, with some in smaller communities. There were not as many in the rural communities as she would like. One bright spot is that there are a number of new programs being funded by tribal set-aside federal funds. A long list of different communities have received this money. There was a need to make sure people are getting connected to those programs.

Katie asked Diane to send the list. She noted that the troopers have a list of DV programs, and she gives a presentation on them each year to hundreds of troopers representing rural Alaska. She added that in the past, when communities have tried CCR teams there have been concerns about sharing case information. She knew that the definition of a CCR team can be very broad. Child fatality review committees have confidentiality in statute. The recommendation might need some language about that.

Rhonda Street from APD said that at every call officers do read the little blue book with AWAIC (Anchorage's DV) program contact information, and AWAIC has advocates in the courthouse 7 days a week. But AWAIC won't reach out; a victim has to contact them. When her team does follow-up work they try to give the victim that information again.

Scotty said that his observation was that a vast majority of DV cases are alcohol- or drug-related, particularly in larger communities that have more alcohol and drug access. Most people experiencing violence from family members are not going to speak up, and will try to resolve it by themselves. But when alcohol is involved, things can get out of hand quickly and fast.

Katie said she could send Scotty some research on AST cases. It was a little dated but has the number of DV cases with alcohol and drug involvement.

Tory Shanklin from Victims for Justice explained that her organization worked in partnership with APD to connect victims to services. VFJ focuses on crime other than DV because other agencies specialize in DV, but referrals to their services are not as strong as they could be. There is the little blue book, but it has an overwhelming amount of information for a brain in trauma. It places the burden on the victim to seek assistance. She suggested looking at how to reduce that burden. She also agreed a lot could be done with service delivery over the phone, and sometimes that's what the victim prefers; it can be more confidential.

Katie said it sounded like the group was discussing two different ideas. In her mind CCR teams look at systemic issues. But it also sounded like the group was talking about high risk teams, which connect individuals to resources.

Sean asked Rhonda if she had a sense how often victims wanted to connect to services when they re-contact them. Rhonda said that sometimes they were surprised about being contacted, and some don't want to talk. Around 30-40% have questions and want to talk to someone. She didn't know whether any of those people actually call the services they're referred to, but they do express interest in those services.

Katie noted that troopers are also required to offer a victim transport to a safe place such as a shelter or relative in addition to providing the booklet. She agreed with Tory that when officers/troopers are reading the booklet to victims, the victims are in trauma and not retaining the information.

Sean asked whether, in terms of this recommendation, the group wanted to spend more time thinking about a high risk team/way to connect victims to advocates—he thought the group sounded pretty interested in that. He wondered if this recommendation should move forward as is, and noted that the funding issue was also an open question.

Diane thought this recommendation gives a broad scope, but with that it was hard to tell what these teams would actually look like. It was more of a broader concept. It would need funding but legislation would need to work out the kinks.

Scotty asked whether the recommendation was calling for a CCR team in each hub, or each village.

Sean said it was basically asking for legislative support for the concept, and it would depend on what the legislature does with it. The question was whether the recommendation should be more specific about what the group actually wants.

Tory thought it should be clearer. She kept going back to the information sharing piece and what that would look like.

Diane agreed, and noted the group might want to consider federal confidentiality laws. If the recommendation is just intended to be a broad concept, it was fine as is, but it would take a lot more work getting into the nitty gritty. Also she didn't want to take out the reference to funding because it would clearly take funding.

Katie asked what the Commission needed to do in terms of detail, what the legislature would like to see, and whether the inclusion of "funding" would make it more difficult. Kaci Schroeder from the Department of Law said she didn't think it needed to be terribly detailed; including "funding" might make it a little more difficult, but the idea should see general support.

Sean said he wanted to move the recommendation forward to the full Commission, and asked whether there was any objection to keeping the "funding" line. There was no objection to moving the recommendation forward or keeping the "funding."

Barbara asked whether the group would also look at a separate recommendation on high risk/victim connection teams. Sean said yes— that would be a much more complicated recommendation and a subject for a future meeting. The group could focus more on rural areas in that recommendation.

Public Comment

There was an opportunity for public comment but there was none.

Future Meetings and Tasks

Diane said that the CDVSA had been doing a lot of work looking at batterer intervention programs, and while the project have been delayed by COVID, she would probably be ready to tell the group about it at the next meeting. They were in the process of pulling information together to come up with specific recommendations.

The next meeting was set for September 16 from 10-12.