

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING AGENDA

10 a.m., Monday, June 22, 2020

Virtual meeting

Committee members in attendance: Solicitor Duffie Stone, 14th Circuit Solicitor; Sara Barber, S.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault executive director; Heather Weiss, S.C. Attorney General's Office; Jay Johnson, 6th Circuit Solicitor's Office; Dr. Jerome Kurent, Medical University of South Carolina; Linda Macon, 6th Circuit Solicitor's Office victim advocate; Sheriff Dennis Kelly, Greenwood County Sheriff; Mahri Irvine, S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control; Devon Hughes, S.C. Criminal Justice Academy; Brandi Nerud, Department of Social Services (for Kelly Cordell); Keelin Ford, S.C. Department of Mental Health (representing Allison Farell).

Also in attendance: Jeff Kidd, 14th Circuit Solicitor's Office; Bobby Brame, USC Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice; Christi Metcalfe, USC Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice; Ashley Manick, USC Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice; Megan Raymer, S.C. Attorney General's Office; Scott Beard, S.C. Attorney General's Office; Andrea Sancho-Baker, S.C. Commission on Prosecution Coordination; Lt. Gianna Williams, S.C. State Law Enforcement Division; Sara Goldsby, Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services; Catie Maffett, Greenwood Sheriff's Office; Burke Fitzpatrick; S.C. Attorney General's Office; Monique Garvin, S.C. Attorney General's Office; Lisa Catalannoto, S.C. Commission on Prosecution Coordination executive editor.

- **CALL TO ORDER**, Duffie Stone, committee chair, Fourteenth Circuit Solicitor, 10:01 a.m.
- **APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES FROM JANUARY 13, 2020, MEETING**, Duffie Stone, committee chair, Fourteenth Circuit Solicitor; delayed vote on minutes approval until next meeting.
- **RECAP OF ACTIONS REGARDING ANNUAL REPORT TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND GOV. MCMASTER**, Duffie Stone. Report was delivered to General Assembly via Committee Members, Rep. Shannon Erickson and Sen. Katrina Shealy; and both electronic and hard copies were sent to the office of Gov. Henry McMaster.
- **REVIEW OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ARRESTS DURING COVID-19 STATE OF EMERGENCY**, Dr. Bobby Brame, University of South Carolina.

Dr. Brame notes that the S.C. Law Enforcement Division provided county-by-county statistics covering each of the past five years that indicated relatively stable incidence of domestic violence. Further, he noted these figures represent only incidents known to the police. However, the national trend shows a steady, annual decline in the percentage of incidents reported to police, starting with 2014. Assuming South Carolina follows this national trend – it's difficult to say for certain if it does – it is not clear why reported incidents would remain stable while reporting rates simultaneously decline. Absent such an explanation, it is difficult to establish a reliable statistical baseline, let alone draw conclusions from the data. (The national numbers he refers to are part of the Bureau of Justice Statistics "Crime Victimization Survey.")

Sara Goldsby said several agencies, including the Department of Social Services, are working to collect information on adverse childhood experiences. The S.C. Children's Trust, DSS and the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control are partners in this survey venture. Possibly, the committee could work to get added to the survey questions regarding violence experienced in the home, though this would provide real-time data, not historical data. Christi Metcalfe of the University of South Carolina noted some caution about the potential for selection bias, since the survey sample includes children already in a service pipeline, likely indicating they are high-risk individuals.

Incidence and reporting of incidence can both go up and down and are independent behaviors, Dr. Brame added. The relationship is not well understood by researchers. The upshot is that it makes any data more difficult to interpret because it's not clear why incidence numbers are stable while reporting rates are going down.

Solicitor Stone asked about historical Silent Witness information compiled by the Attorney General's Office. Heather Weiss and Monique Garvin of the office indicated they would attempt to compile some of this information for Solicitor Stone and the committee. Weiss noted difference in numbers across the 22 years – homosexual couples are now included in tallies, reflecting changes to state law and judicial precedents established after the list was first compiled.

Brame noted his research team is seeking funding that would allow an analysis of the domestic violence workflow for the 14th Circuit Solicitor's Office. The team should know by September or October if they will be awarded.

Ahead of today's meeting, SLED provided a breakdown of domestic violence arrests during the COVID-19 emergency and widespread shutdowns, comparing the number to comparable periods over the previous two years. Brame said he had questions about how the numbers were compiled, including whether all agencies are contributing to the figures and, if not, how many are not reporting. Giana Williams believes all agencies are reporting, but she will confirm and report back to the group.

Brame explained why establishing a reliable baseline through the use of surveys is expensive. Intimate-partner violence is relatively rare in terms of the total population – about six to seven incidents per 1,000 people – so to get a reliable sample in light of low reporting rates would require a lot of respondents. He added that his colleague, Christi Metcalfe, has been researching ways to cut costs via online surveys, however, even that will require some funding from some source.

Sara Goldsby noted that DHEC's Division of Violence conducts a survey funded by Centers for Disease Control, using phone surveys of South Carolinians. In recent years, her agency, the S.C. Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services, has paid to add questions to that survey. Possibly, we could get questions related to domestic violence on this survey. While there is a price tag to it, it's not an entirely new survey and is accepted as valid. The charge is per question and DAODAS has used grant funding in the past to pay for its questions. Data is generally collected in the spring, so there is a deadline to get the questions in. Sara offered to get Solicitor Stone and Dr. Brame in touch with the DHEC manager who oversees the survey.

Mahri Irvine of DHEC said she was surprised to hear Brame characterized domestic violence as “low-incidence.” NCBS questions might result in low numbers, but we know that other research studies show that interpersonal violence is a common experience throughout the nation, so it’s important for us to figure out which survey questions will help us get the most accurate data about victimization and perpetration. Dr. Brame said he’s not implying it is rare in terms of lifetime experience, but it’s statistically rare, according to NCBS numbers. One possibility for amplifying the statistical sample is assigning weights to NCBS estimates.

Jeff Kidd of the 14th Circuit Solicitor’s Office asked how the committee might specifically address lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic in its 2021 annual report. For instance, he noted anecdotal evidence that the arrest of females for domestic violence offenses rose as the state of emergency wore on, to the point that they accounted for a majority of the arrests in his circuit over the past two weeks.

Others agreed it might be useful to know whether this is an anomaly and, if not, why drove the number. Sara Barber of the S.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault said she has statewide shelter data that would be applied to an analysis of trends during the pandemic. She noted that while the overall number of reports seems to be about on par with the same period in previous years, the level of violence involved in those individual reports seems to be increasing in intensity.

Several posited that domestic violence during this period could be under-reported, particularly initially, as victims were sheltered in close quarters and around the clock with their abusers. Many otherwise inclined to seek help might not have done so if they questioned the availability of services during the pandemic. Dr. Jerome Kurent of the Medical University of South Carolina asked whether state law enforcement agencies could all use standardized data reporting forms that would be returned on a quarterly basis. This would provide data on an ongoing basis for analysis in a way not previously made available. Giana Williams said she will inquire about the reporting and that a change, if necessary, might require coordination with the S.C. Criminal Justice Academy. Greenwood Sheriff Dennis Kelly agreed.

Irvine said that after the meeting’s conclusion, she would send around a link to a video, that could in turn be distributed to law-enforcement victim advocates, describing how police answering domestic-violence calls should go about determining a primary aggressor. Sara Barber also has a copy that she’ll send to Solicitor Stone and Lisa Catalanotto of the Commission on Prosecution Coordination for distribution to the state’s solicitors.

Heather Weiss noted similar training is available as part of Violence Against Women Act programs, which recently went to a webinar format. These were compiled by Monique Garvin of the Attorney General’s Office and are available for streaming on the agency’s VAWA page – www.youbreakthesilence.com. Weiss said she will send the link out to the group.

- **ADJOURNMENT, 11:02 a.m.**