



**Mission:** *To promote a community-wide response to sexual violence by coordinating a multi-disciplinary team that will ensure victims receive comprehensive, compassionate care.*

## **Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) General Meeting Minutes Thursday April 30, 2020**

### **Call to Order:**

Nicole Bishop, Director, Palm Beach County Victim Services & Certified Rape Crisis Center (PBCVS)

### **Welcome/Introductions of Members and Guests:**

Nicole Bishop welcomed all who were in attendance at the meeting and facilitated introductions.

**Review/Approval of minutes:** Minutes for the February 27<sup>th</sup> meeting were approved without any changes.

### **COVID-19 Operational Updates:**

#### *Sexual Assault Investigations – Sgt Juliana Martinez, PBSO*

Sgt Martinez provided an update regarding PBSO's response to sexual assault victims during COVID-19: road patrol and the Special Investigations Division (SID) have been cautious and are using PPEs and masks; SID was outfitted with PPE. Investigative processes are being done at a later date when appropriate to reduce possible exposure to COVID-19. Sgt Martinez highlighted that adapting to people's comfort levels for responding to investigations has been difficult. SID are conducting their investigations and meetings in an open air environment and over the telephone. SID is short staffed right now – the unit was set to interview and hire 2 detectives but were unable to for COVID-19. Emergency calls have increased and delayed calls have decreased. Overall interaction with community is decreased.

#### *Forensic Laboratory Testing – Julie Sikorsky, Forensic Biology Unit Manager, PBSO*

Julie provided an update regarding PBSO's forensic lab's response to sexual assault victims during COVID-19: the forensic lab is able to provide all standard services at this time and are working diligently to still trying to process Sexual Assault Kits (SAKs) within 120 hours. The forensic lab tried to stock pile supplies and kits in advance due to unexpected events in the supply chain that could happen as a result of COVID-19. Julie explained the lab is seeing decrease in the number of case requests by about 20 case requests per month. SAK requests have continued to be consistent with a decrease of about 2 requests per month. Adaptive modifications in operations are effecting turnaround time across the board but the lab can still take expedited testing requests when appropriate. The forensic lab is able to outsource violent cases through approximately August. These cases will have a negative effect on the backlogs and cause them to grow. Good news: Julie highlighted that the forensic lab has 1 analyst in screening training and 4 analysts in DNA screening.

Prosecution of Sexual Assault – Marci Rex, Chief of Special Victims Unit, SAO

Marci Rex provided an update regarding the State Attorney's Office's response to sexual assault victims during COVID-19: attorneys continue to work remotely but are starting to weave back into the office at a controlled pace by working remotely 2 days a week. At this time, the office is shut down for the public so Marci's team is unable to have meetings or face to face contact with victims and witnesses. The SAO is asking all visitors to wear masks and is taking temperatures at the door. Some court hearings are happening, but types of hearings being held are limited. Marci reported that there are no jury trials at this time and will not resume until May 29<sup>th</sup> at the earliest. To limit their exposure to COVID-19, Marci has been hearing some victims do not want to go into the courthouse at all. At this time, depositions are being done over the phone however Marci's unit has not had a victim deposition yet but because of this change, no one from the SAO will be able to be with the victim during depositions. Marci believes that when this is all over, agencies across the board as well as SAO specifically will see an increase in cases. SAO SVU is still available and they are utilizing this time wisely by continuing their education through current and relevant online learning opportunities.

Advocacy & Crisis Field Response – Rene Boone, PBCVS Supervisor

Rene Boone provided an update regarding Palm Beach County Victim Services' response to sexual assault victims during COVID-19: at this time Victim Services continues to provide all of our services to crime victims – just in an alternate form – advocates are presently only responding out to the Butterfly House for SA cases (if a victim is at an Emergency Room/Hospital and can't be relocated to the Butterfly House, due to injuries/Baker Act/Under Arrest/etc...PBCVS SANEs will respond to obtain Forensic Evidence collection and PBCVS advocates will contact victim via phone). All victims coming to the Butterfly House, if they have not already been screened by LE and/or hospital staff, will be screened. All persons entering the Butterfly House will be provided with a mask and gloves. During the examination, only the victim, advocate and SANE will be allowed in the Butterfly House. When LE is conducting interviews at the Butterfly House the chairs can be moved to maintain social distance and everyone can continue to wear mask provided.

Victim Services advocates are not responding out to Crime Scenes, law enforcement agencies, or CPT at this time – please continue to contact our Helpline after hours and SART Center during the day to staff sexual assault cases for assistance as advocates can and are contacting victims via phone. If LE is doing an interview with a victim some detectives have been calling and the advocate is joining in the interview via speaker/phone.

Rene reminded SART members that the Butterfly House is a Forensic Collection Site and not a medical facility. If victims have any injuries (that need medical attention) they should be transported to the ER – however to lessen exposure of everyone involved, if a victim has been screened and has no injuries please transport to the Butterfly House after you have contacted Victim Services and staffed the case. As a reminder: PBCVS Butterfly House is not a manned site and Victim Services needs to be contacted to dispatch an advocate and SANE prior to showing up.

Victim Services has made and continues to make adaptations as needed to make sure that all crime victims in Palm Beach County continue to receive all services available to them and that their rights as a victim of a crime are not hindered during this time. All PBCVS offices are still open however victims are not being seen in person. Victims can contact any of the 5 PBCVS locations via phone and an advocate will provide services. PBCVS staff have been provided PPEs for all advocates and anyone entering the Butterfly House. Social media is being utilized to get the word out to the community and agencies that we are still open and operational during this pandemic.

I would like to stress that the safety of the victims, our advocates and the agencies we work with is of the up most importance to us all – while continuing to provide services to the victims – we have implemented many procedures to continue to provide these services in a safe environment – using PPE’s, doing extra cleanings, using phone and video conferencing when possible – what PBCVS can’t do is not be there for the victims when they need our services. Rene requested that all agencies please share that PBCVS is still open and available with partners and the community (via word of mouth, social media etc.).

*Sexual Assault Kit Collection – Lisa Alward, PBCVS SANE Program Coordinator*

Lisa Alward provided an update regarding Palm Beach County Victim Services’ SANE response to sexual assault victims during COVID-19: SANEs are still responding to complete forensic examinations and collect evidence at this time. SANEs are asking everyone to wear a mask at butterfly house. All processes and procedures are running as smooth as it can with the preventative measures and adaptations that have been taken. Patients are still able to go from Butterfly House to the ER for prophylaxis medications. The SANE program is developing web based training for hospital staff to continue education on PBCVS and sexual assault response. Lisa reported that for March 2020 there were 20 call outs and in April 2020 there were 17 call outs.

**Legislative Updates:**

*Abby Ross, Legislative Aide for Sen Barman; PBC Legislative Affairs*

Abby explained to SART members that legislators are very much concerned with unemployment throughout the state and that is where much focus has been in the past several weeks/months. Abby compiled and provided a list of bills and highlighted several. Please see attached document “Legislative Updates from Spring 2020 Session.”

**Member Field Discussion:** Nicole opened the floor to members to discuss successful collaborations or provide updates.

*Jennifer Rey with Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse, Inc (AVDA)* provided an update regarding how COVID-19 has impacted their domestic violence shelter. AVDA’s shelter is currently running at half capacity in order to follow CDC guidelines of social distancing. The shelter and AVDA are still fully operational in outreach services. The shelter has dedicated 14-day isolation rooms for new individuals/families entering the shelter before being placed in closer proximity to other clients. AVDA has been receiving catered meals and food donations are coming in for clients. AVDA does

not have access to PPE materials – staff and clients are making and using DIY masks per CDC guidelines.

*Laura Cusack with Coalition for Independent Living Options Inc (CILO)* provided an update that CILO is still operating and advocates continue to work with and provide services to clients in need. CILO has several programs, some of which include one to assist with utility bills as well as a program to financially assist clients over 60 years old to pay for movers. Please see attached flyer “Financial Assistance”.

*Orietta Levinson with Chrysalis Health* wanted SART members to know that their agency is still fully operational and is providing telehealth services to clients during the COVID-19 crisis. Individual and family mental health or substance abuse therapy is available to any person 3 years and older.

*Alex Lee of Palm Beach County Behavioral Health Coalition (PBCBHC)* provided information on their Mental Health First Aid Project. This is a training course to give those trained the tools to help someone who is developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. PBCBHC also has an open community forum that lists resources during this time of COVID-19. PBCBHC continues to provide trainings online for students and families and their upcoming HIV/Substance Prevention event/training calendar will coming out soon.

**Next meeting date:** May 28, 2020 @ 2pm – 3pm  
Thank you!

## Legislative Updates from Spring 2020 Session

### **SB 170/HB 199 – Sexual Battery Time Limitation (Stewart/Davis/Plakon) – “Donna’s Law”** **<https://www.flsenate.gov/Committees/bills/summaries/2020/html/2190>**

- The bill eliminates the statute of limitations for sexual assault when the victim is under the age of 18
- Currently, there are different limitations based on the victim’s age
  - No statute of limitations for sexual assault if the victim was *younger than 16* at the time of the offense.
  - However, there is an 8-year statute of limitations if the victim is over the age of 16
- The bill does not change the fact that the state has to **prove** their case against the accused **with evidence** in court and the bill only applies to offenses committed after July 1, 2020.
- The bill was named in honor of a woman named Donna who was victimized by a teacher when she was in high school. She held on to this secret for decades before finally going public and finding out that there were several other victims from that same teacher.
- Unfortunately, she found that the statute of limitations had expired. Rather than get discouraged and drop the issue, she started an online petition to repeal the statute of limitations for minor victims. That petition has been signed by nearly 30,000 supporters.

### **SB 510/HB 333 – Bail Pending Appellate Review (Wright/Leek)** **<https://www.flsenate.gov/Committees/bills/summaries/2020/html/2138>**

- The bill expands the list of offenses for which a conviction prohibits a court from granting bail to a defendant pending appeal to include any offense requiring registration as a sexual offender or sexual predator, if, at the time of the offense:
  - The defendant/offender was 18 or older; and
  - The victim was a minor.

### **SB 1018/HB 675 – Exposure of Sexual Organs (Stewart/Mercado)** **<https://www.flsenate.gov/Committees/bills/summaries/2020/html/2137>**

- The bill addresses the crime of indecent exposure, which occurs when an individual exposes sexual organs in a vulgar or indecent manner.
- The bill creates a misdemeanor exception, allowing a warrantless arrest if an officer has probable cause to believe an individual has committed an act of indecent exposure
- This gives law enforcement the ability to act without delay to apprehend a suspect before they re-offend or escalate their acts
- The bill increases the penalty for repeat offenders to a 3<sup>rd</sup> degree felony
- This will allow the crime to be meaningfully prosecuted when an individual shows a pattern of this behavior.
- The bill also clarifies current law to ensure that:

- Public nudity is unlawful only when it is vulgar or indecent; and
- Nudity at a *place provided or set aside for that purpose* is not unlawful

**SB 1082/HB 241 – Domestic Violence Injunctions (Albritton/Killebrew/Silvers)**  
<https://www.flsenate.gov/Committees/bills/summaries/2020/html/2110>

- It authorizes a court issuing a domestic violence injunction to:
  - Award to the petitioner the exclusive care, possession, or control of an animal that the petitioner, the respondent, or a minor child residing in the home of either party owns, possesses, harbors, keeps, or holds, except an animal owned primarily for a bona fide agricultural purpose or a service animal, if the respondent is the service animal's handler;
  - Order the respondent to have no contact with the animal; and
  - Prohibit the respondent from taking, transferring, encumbering, concealing, harming, or otherwise disposing of the animal.

**OSGR = Open Government Sunset Review Act**

**SB 7034/HB 7013 – OGSR/Residential Facilities Serving Victims of Sexual Exploitation**  
<https://www.flsenate.gov/Committees/bills/summaries/2020/html/2097>

- Removes scheduled repeal of exemptions from public records requirements for information about location of certain residential facilities serving victims of sexual exploitation.
- Current law provides public record exemptions for information about the location of safe houses, safe foster homes, and other residential facilities serving child victims of commercial sexual exploitation and residential facilities serving adult victims of human trafficking involving commercial sexual activity.
- However, the confidential and exempt location information may be provided to an agency in order to maintain health and safety standards and to address emergencies. The bill saves from repeal the public record exemptions, which will repeal on October 2, 2020, if this bill does not become law

**SB 7036/HB 7019 – OGSR/Human Trafficking Victims**  
<https://www.flsenate.gov/Committees/bills/summaries/2020/html/2192>

- Removes scheduled repeal of exemption from public records requirements for certain criminal intelligence & criminal investigative information that reveal identity of certain human trafficking victim
- The original public necessity statement for the bill provides that the identity of victims of human trafficking is of a sensitive personal nature. Without this exemption, the release of identifying information may cause further trauma or cause unwarranted damage to the good name or reputation of the victim. Furthermore, victims of human trafficking who

have been convicted of crimes committed at the direction of their traffickers are themselves victims of crime. Without the public records exemption these victims face barriers to employment and other life opportunities.

- It requires the automatic repeal of such exemption on October 2nd of the fifth year after creation or substantial amendment, unless the Legislature reenacts the exemption.

# The Coalition for Independent Living Options is now taking applications for **Financial Assistance**



Funding for this program provided by Palm Beach County Division of Community Services. To promote independence and enhance the quality of life in Palm Beach County by providing effective and essential services to residents in need.

How can I qualify for financial assistance with CILO?

- ✓ I have at least one person in the home with a documented disability OR I am over 60 with a documented disability.
- ✓ I have a 3-day notice, eviction notice, utility shut-off notice OR I need assistance with first, last, and/or deposit OR I am over 60 and need help with moving expenses.
- ✓ I'm a resident of Palm Beach County
- ✓ My household income falls within the guidelines below OR I'm over age 60.

You will need to be able to provide the following documents at the time of your appointment:

- 1) Photo ID
- 2) Proof of Disability
- 3) Proof Palm Beach County Residency
- 4) Proof of Need (eviction notice, termination notice, 3-day notice, lease, moving quote)
- 5) Proof of What Caused the Need (crime incident, unexpected bill or expense, sudden loss of income, need to move)
- 6) Proof of Income



## TOTAL

Persons in household	household income from all sources
1	12,760.00
2	17,240.00
3	21,720.00
4	26,200.00
5	30,680.00
6	35,160.00
7	39,640.00
8	44,120.00

 4400 N. Congress Ave Ste 203  
West Palm Beach, FL 33407

For more information or to see if you qualify, please call Amber Lott at (561) 966-4288 ext. 101.