



Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority

ILLINOIS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITY REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: November 19, 2024

Time: 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm

Location: Webex

Subject: Fifteenth Meeting of the Illinois Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee

Task Force Member Attendance	Present	Telephone	Absent
Sen. Sally Turner			X
Rep. Maurice West			X
Sen. Tony McCombie			X
Rep. Celina Villanueva			X
Jennifer Cacciapaglia, City of Rockford (Megan Brechon in her absence)	X		
Jenny Schoenwetter, Harbor House	X		
Jennifer Greene, Life Span Chicago			X
Judge Robert Anderson	X		
Sara Block	X		
Amanda Pyron	X		
Vickie Smith	X		
Willette Benford, Live Free Illinois			X
Jennifer Vancil, Quanada	X		
Michelle Meyer			X
Jeannine Woods			X
Meg Hefty, Sarah's Inn Forest Park	X		
Jenna Lopez, YWCA			X
Megan Alderden, DePaul University, Program Director of Criminology	X		
Fawn Pettet, Land of Lincoln, Alton	X		
Carol Klarquist, Office of the Illinois State Public Defender	X		
Stacy Short, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services			X
Amanda Vasquez	X		
Thomas Golebiewski			X
Wendy Cohen, Attorney General Office	X		
Emily Miller, Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy Office of Illinois Governor JB Pritzker			X
Dan Likens, ISP Division of Criminal Investigations Zone 1 Commander	X		
Teresa Tudor, Illinois Department of Human Services			X
Dr. Jacob Stelter, North Shore, Lake County	X		
Ariana Correa	X		
Ret. Chief Tom Weitzel			X
Sheriff Andy Hires			X
Amirrah Abou-Youssef			X

MEETING MINUTES

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

- a. Co-Chair Sara Block called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. and welcomed Illinois Domestic Fatality Review Task Force members to the eighth meeting. Risolute of ICJIA conducted roll call and quorum was not met.

2. Old Business

- a. Vote to adopt minutes from August 13, 2024, meeting

With no discussion or requested amendments, Vancil made a motion to approve the minutes seconded by Pettet. Motion carried.

3. New Business

- a. Introductions and Welcome to Andrea Wilson, Director of DVFR Initiative

Wilson introduced herself, then members took turns introducing themselves.

- b. Mission Moment and Discussion

On October 13, 2024, an offender approached the victim on foot while Maria Lazaro-Castillo was sitting in her parked vehicle and shot her multiple times. The suspect is Tony Hernandez. Maria received an earlier, but not served, OP from Tony the same month she was slain. Tony was arrested in September 2017 for aggravated assault with a deadly weapon and in June 2017 was arrested for criminal damage to property and possession of burglary tools.

- c. Administrative Updates

- i. Training Reminder –

Trainings must be completed by the end of the year. Please attempt to log in asap so as to avoid challenges at the end of the year. Log in at <https://OneNet.Illinois.gov/MyTraining>

Contact Wilson with questions.

- ii. DVFRC Annual Report

The report is due March 1. The content is operations and activities of the Statewide Committee and the Regional Review Teams. The Committee will receive a draft for review one to two weeks prior

to the February 2025 Committee meeting

Co-Chair involvement?

iii. Potential Legislative Changes to DVFRA

The committee discussed changing quorum requirements. The current Regional Committee quorum is 7, and leadership wants to ensure that business could be conducted. However now some teams are running into Open Meetings Act challenges. Leadership is asking to change to majority of the voting members

The next consideration is timeframe for reporting. The statutory timeframe (March 1) is challenging when considering the levels of review reports undergo at ICJIA. Co-Chair Block asked to change it to June or July.

The final consider was medical records. There have been challenges with UW Health and Mental Health, Substance Abuse, HIV Status, etc.

iv. Media Requests and Press Releases

Both the Committee and RRT members have received press inquiries. Cristin has created a one-page reference document for Committee members and RRTs. Wilson will prioritize adding media inquiries and Initiative promotion to confidentiality trainings and guidance.

d. Report Out on DVFR Conference and Interviewing Discussion

i. DVFR Conference

Overview: An Illinois contingent comprised of Statewide Committee and regional review teams members attended a two-day Fatality Review conference in Prescott, AZ, in mid-October. The conference was organized by the National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative and Dr. Neil Websdale's team with the Family Violence Center at Arizona State University.

Attendees: Three Statewide Committee members (Vasquez, and co-chairs, Block, and Alderden) and about 10 regional review team members from the 17th, 19th, and 21st Circuits, representing Lake (2), Rockford/ Winnebago (2), and Kankakee (6) counties

attended the conference. Hundreds of people from throughout the country and individuals representing initiatives in Scotland, Portugal, El Salvador, Canada, and New Zealand attended in-person and virtually.

Topics: Attendees had an opportunity to attend plenary sessions on the intersection between domestic violence-related fatalities and mental health and to hear from established teams, new teams, and international teams. Sara Block represented the Illinois initiative as a panelist during the new fatality review teams plenary session. Attendees also had the option to attend a mock fatality review session each afternoon or breakout sessions on fatality reviews in native, indigenous, and Indian communities, working with families, confidentiality, and perpetrator involvement in the review process.

Experience: Afforded teams an invaluable opportunity to connect with other Illinois teams and to learn from others doing similar work. Co-chairs and ICJIA staff are exploring the idea of hosting an in-person meeting for regional review teams to network and receive training in Spring of 2025.

Other key takeaways/recommendations

- Conducting interviews: Members **SHOULD** review case materials prior to conducting interviews. Interviewees report the interview process as being cathartic, but not bringing closure. Reviews are more well-rounded when they include the perpetrator. May want to consider having law enforcement conduct these interviews with a mental health professional. Other considerations include taking care to not give the perpetrator a platform or an opportunity to excuse behavior, and notifying the victim's family. Report what the interviewee said, NOT your interpretation of the interview
- Other initiatives: In other parts of the world, such as the UK, individual cases are published; while they are anonymous, the involved individuals can be deduced. Fatality review initiatives differ in terms of the number and depth of their case reviews. Some teams described reviewing only two cases annually enabling them to conduct an in-depth case review (New Zealand). Others initiatives are charged with reviewing all domestic violence-related homicides (Canada) or have elected to review one case a month (Nebraska).

ii. Interviewing Discussion

On October 21st, the co-chairs and Vasquez facilitated an interviewing discussion with leads from each of the five pioneer teams. To help teams begin to prepare for conducting their first interviews, we wanted to provide them with an opportunity to engage in an open dialogue about the interview process, including sharing their experiences and asking questions.

Leadership started by sharing information and resources with the teams. This included providing them with an overview of interview stages leadership had identified, such as deciding who to interview, contacting survivors or others, sharing out interviews with team members, and engaging in self-care as well as some considerations at each stage. For example, when deciding who to interview, team members need to consider whether to interview any survivors, survivors' family members, friends, and acquaintances, the perpetrator and their family, friends, and acquaintances, and any service providers or professionals having contact with the survivor or perpetrator.

Leadership also reviewed the information contained in the guidebook on the interview process and reminded them it is intended to be a living document and that we anticipate it will be further refined after teams conduct their first interviews.

Leadership also reviewed 10 principles of trauma-informed practices adapted from a 2005 article written by Denise Elliot and colleagues published in the Journal of Community Psychology. Some of the most critical principles included placing an emphasis on the survivors' recovery in members' approach to conducting interviews and by providing a resource list, providing choices and a sense of control by allowing survivors to share their stories in the way they want to share them, and minimizing re-traumatization through active listening and by being clear about the purpose of the DVFR process.

Then Jayden, the 21st Circuit/Kankakee county team lead, shared her experience conducting an interview with a survivor. She'll share more about that experience in her regional review team update.

Lastly, leadership presented teams with some additional interviewing topics for consideration and future exploration. Teams raised the importance of being intentional in how members share out what they learned through interviews and making sure to prevent bias, should be just the facts, discussed benefits and drawbacks to recording interviews, and which hat or role they

have when conducting interviews and case reviews. Training and technical assistance moving forward will include updating the interview section of the guidebook and virtual and in-person convenings of teams, co-chairs, and ICJIA staff on a semi-regular basis.

e. Regional Review Team Updates

Regional teams provided updates on their progress.

- i. Lake 19th: Block shared that they have selected their first case to review and have begun collecting information.
- ii. Madison/Bond 3rd: Pettet shared that the first review session is scheduled for January. There have been some changes in membership, which has added several excited, active members. They are in the data collection phase. In the next two weeks, they plan to reach out to two witnesses to collect information. Pettet shared she has reached out to 21st Regional Team to gather resources to support her team.
- iii. Winnebago/Boone 17th: Sheehama updated that they are in the middle of data collection with the review scheduled. The offender had gone to multiple counties, so they're navigating collecting information from multiple local counties. They are meeting with the mother of a victim in regards to how to conduct the most trauma-informed interview for such sensitive topics.
- iv. Will 12th: Alderden stated they have identified their case, potential interviewees, and more. They are in the data collection phase, too.
- v. Kankakee 21st: Co-Chair Block asked 21st Judicial Circuit DVFRT Co-Chair Anderson-Baker to share her experience as the first team to complete a review.

What process did the team use to select the case?

Harbor House has an existing list tracking most of the DV-related deaths in Kankakee and Iroquois Counties. The team also submitted some that may have missed in that list, which the coroner was especially helpful with. The team then used that information to categorize which cases are eligible for review (there were questions on some— and leaned on TTA for direction), which cases are not suitable/appropriate for review (such as too old, limited information, etc.), and cases that are definitely ineligible at this time (case has not been adjudicated yet, but the team may be able to review it down the line).

Then, Anderson-Baker created a case presentation with case summaries of eligible cases (about 5) and the team spent a meeting

discussing the cases and then voted on their case for the first review. During that meeting, members provided more context based on what they knew personally from the case, and that helped the team decide. Anderson-Baker recommends coming prepared with the information about the cases for that very important decision. After that discussion, some cases went to the not suitable/appropriate for review category.

All of this information was always available for team members to review prior to and in between meetings on SharePoint. Anderson-Baker focused on being extremely communicative with the team so members did not feel uninformed and highly encouraged them to continue to review all of the info in the SharePoint throughout the five months.

How did the data collection process work? Were there any particular barriers or challenges that the team faced? What about that worked well?

The team took about half of a meeting initially to assign who was going to collect what data. They started with members going to their individual organizations/agencies, which worked well and most efficiently. From meeting to meeting, they spent time checking in on this process and evaluated whether or not they had any missing pieces and who to contact to get them. Members used their connections to get additional, relevant information.

A major barrier experienced was an inability to get mental health data from our hospitals. Both of the local hospitals worked diligently on this but because of the mental health code, they were not able to access it. Mental health data may be relevant to these cases, so they felt that was a missing piece.

Once the actual review started, the team needed data from IDOC so a member submitted a FOIA request but that request was denied.

Other than those two barriers, it was pretty simple to get data, it just took a while. The team did not have to send any formal request letters or correspondence. The members were skilled in leveraging their relationships and connections with the knowledge of DVFR and the process to open doors.

How long did this take?

Data collection took about a total of 4 meetings, or 4 months. It was a bulk of the time spent on this case.

How did you approach who to interview? Share concerns your team had? Any lessons learned there?

The team got a list of victims and witnesses from our State's Attorney's Office in the beginning. From there, the team sent out a mailing to them that included a formal request for an interview, a survivor resource guide/DVFR FAQs, and Anderson-Baker's business card. The team received one response from the mailing. They gave it about 3 weeks between the mailing when they started making phone calls. They did not get any immediate answers, so they left VMs. They received one response from the phone calls, but ultimately did not hear back after following up. They ended up moving forward with just the one interview, which provided a lot of great information and insight into the case. They used some of the interview questions that were provided in the guidebook. The interview lasted about 45 minutes and was via Zoom and not recorded.

Some of the main concerns were with re-traumatization and how to approach the request in a trauma-informed way that would assure the interviewee that this process was completely their choice and confidential. They cited the statute in the letter (including confidentiality) and included the FAQ. For the one interview that was conducted, they shared the questions ahead of time as well. One of Anderson-Baker's main concerns was confidentiality from the DV program side since the agency staff was the one conducting the interviews. The team ultimately decided that it would default to Harbor House's policies on information sharing which included getting an ROI. Another concern kind of in line with that was documentation. The team ultimately decided that Anderson-Baker would provide the team with a "just the facts" summary of the interview. When she gave that summary, the team identified some additional questions that they would like to be asked, so we will keep that in mind for future reviews.

Final thoughts on completing the review

To give a timeline, the team launched in June 2024. From June to October, they met almost monthly to discuss data collection, data sharing, confidentiality, interviews, etc. in preparation for the case. Then, on October 28th, they began the formal review for 2 hours where we primarily focused on building the chronological timeline. The team had already put together in date order the information they collected individually, but for next time, they

will have a master data collection document that will make building the timeline easier. After this meeting, there were a few data items they wanted to collect that came up through gaps they noticed so they worked on obtaining those documents. They met again on November 7th for 2 hours to finish the timeline and identify red flags/antecedents/risk factors/protective factors. The final meeting was on November 19th to identify areas of community engagement and compile some reflections from the case. It took about 6 hours total to complete the review and about 5 months to prepare for it.

Something learned is that although the framework given is a four step process, the review will likely not be linear. Teams may choose to identify the red flags/antecedents/risk factors/protective factors while you are building the timeline. Teams may have reflections during this time as well. Consider keeping a document open to record or having the secretary document the reflections and/or questions throughout the process because the team had a lot of those and it was important for them to take note so we can go back to them.

The team in Kankakee is really fortunate to all know and work with each other daily outside of the fatality review. They have a really great network of professionals who are dedicated to multidisciplinary response so the transition from some of our other groups into DVFR was somewhat seamless. Have patience with yourself and others- building those relationships takes a lot of time.

From a technical side, if a part of leadership for the team, or are responsible for note-taking, agendas, minutes, etc., stay organized. There is a lot of information that will be gathered. Use SharePoint's features to the team's advantage and go crazy with the folders. It will help keep yourself and the team on track and clear of where everything is/needs to be.

Transparency and communication were so important. Anderson-Baker made it very clear to the team that they were all in this learning process together. Provide lots of gratitude, appreciation, honesty.

Going forward, they will likely and ideally structure the 2 reviews a year as such: Review 1 will take place January through May; summer break in June; Review 2 will take place July through October; winter break in November and December.

- f. Calendar of 2025 Meetings
 - i. February 4, 2025
 - ii. May 6, 2025
 - iii. August 5, 2025
 - iv. November 4, 2025

4. Public Comment

Cohen announced that it was V. Smith's final meeting

5. Adjournment

The next meeting will be February 4 at 1 p.m.

A motion to adjourn was made by Vancil. Schoenwetter seconded the motion. Motion Carried. Meeting adjourned at 2:16 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Secretary Jenny Schoenwetter.