



**Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics & Public Trust**

**Investigative Report**

**Investigator:** Karl Ross

<b>Case PI 15-046</b>	<b>Case Name: CVAC</b>	<b><u>Date Open:</u></b>	<b><u>Date Closed:</u></b>
<b>Complainant(s):</b> Jorge Veitia	<b>Subject(s):</b> Katariina Rosenblatt, Ivon Mesa	Oct. 19, 2015	<b>CASE CLOSED</b>

**Allegation(s):**

Date:

4/7/2016

Mr. Veitia claimed the County's Coordinated Victims Assistance Center (CVAC) was operating without adequate oversight and accountability. He stated his organization has been identified on CVAC's website as a member of the center's coalition, but he said this was done without his advisement or consent and that attempts to obtain information from CVAC were denied in possible violation of the Citizen's Bill of Rights.

Mr. Veitia further raised questions as to whether a conflict of interest might exist with respect to the referral of victims to outside organizations. In particular, he alleged that one of the employees at the center ran a non-profit organization serving victims of sexual trafficking and that the employee steered victims to her organization in possible violation of the ethics code.

**Relevant Ordinances:**

The Miami-Dade County Citizen's Bill of Rights in Article 23 titled *Public Records*, states that "All audits, reports, minutes, documents and other public records of the City and its boards, agencies, departments and authorities shall be open for inspection at reasonable time and places convenient to the public."

The Miami-Dade County Code of Ethics and Conflict of Interest Ordinance, Section 2-11.1, subsection (g), titled *Exploitation of official position prohibited*, states in applicable part that ... "No person ... shall use or attempt to use his or her official position to secure special privileges or exemptions for himself or herself or others..."

## **Investigation:**

### ***Interviews***

Jorge Veitia, executive director

The Life of Freedom Center

Oct. 27, 2015

Mr. Veitia appeared at COE offices for an interview in which he reiterated concerns he stated in an Oct. 16 email about the County's CVAC, located at 2400 US 1. He said the center, run by Ivon Mesa, operates in a secretive fashion and with seemingly little accountability. He said that his organization is identified by CVAC as a member of its coalition, but that his efforts to learn more about CVAC and his organization's role as a member of its coalition have been fruitless. He said e-mails and phone calls seeking information have not been returned.

Mr. Veitia said he believes resources available through the center –such as bus passes and housing rental assistance – are not being allocated fairly and that he suspects they are being used for what he described in his e-mail as “a small group of entitled organizations that seem to only benefit from coalition if they are preferred by the director of CVAC.”

With respect to his organization's inclusion in the coalition, Mr. Veitia stated, “What I've encountered is not a coalition ... just a paper list.” He said members of the coalition are not consulted with respect to CVAC's programs and the center lacks a board of directors. He said he thinks the names of organizations such as his are used on grant applications, so CVAC can use them when it applies for state or federal funding and grants. He said CVAC has funding from, among other sources, the US Department of Justice. “We're listed as a member (of the coalition), but we're not included in any oversight,” he complained.

Mr. Veitia questioned the process by which resources controlled by CVAC are distributed, such as monthly bus and rail passes worth \$113 each. He said they are kept in a safe, and that victims such as those served by his organization don't have access to them. He said that when he attempts to ask about oversight, Ivon Mesa simply tells him she reports to the mayor's office. He said he was told CVAC is conducting “a vetting process” into his organization, but said he has misgivings about this process because Mesa refused to tell him how it works.

Mr. Veitia stated that another employee of CVAC – author and victims advocate Katariina Rosenblatt – runs a non-profit organization serving victims of sex trafficking and that, as an employee of CVAC, she has referred walk-in clients to her organization. He said that “the money tends to follow the victim,” and suggested Rosenblatt might have a conflict. He said the name of her organization is, “There is Hope for Me” and her book is titled “Stolen.”

“She gets referrals from CVAC,” he said, with reference to Rosenblatt.

Mr. Veitia stated his organization belongs to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center database, a national registry operated by an entity known as Polaris and used for official research. He said his organization was vetted by the NHTRC, but questioned the methodology used by CVAC, run in practice by a single individual, in its review of his organization.

Lucia Davis-Raiford, Director

Miami-Dade County Community Action and Human Services

Nov. 9, 2015

Ms. Davis-Raiford said she was unaware of the concerns raised by the complainant, and expressed that she would be willing to assist with the inquiry. She said CVAC has five employees and is led by Ivon Mesa, who also oversees five county shelters or transitional housing sites for victims of domestic and other abuse. She said Mesa reports to Marie Woodson, the assistant department director and that Woodson reports to her.

Ms. Davis-Raiford said there is no oversight board other than the Community Action and Human Services Board. She said that Mesa presently is the chairwoman of this board. She said that CVAC has 32 to 39 "partners" that provide services at the main CVAC office. She said that CVAC is modeled after a successful program started in San Diego, CA.

Ms. Davis-Raiford said she thinks Katariina Rosenblatt is in charge of victim services for victims of sex trafficking. She said she would be concerned if CVAC were referring victims or providing resources to benefit Ms. Rosenblatt's non-profit organization. "I would be very concerned if there was any form of profiteering taking place," she said.

Jan. 4, 2016

As a follow-up to the previous contact, Ms. Davis-Raiford advised that Veitia's organization could not be used for the purpose of obtaining grand funding because a memorandum of understanding between the two organizations would be required.

She did say that a problem such as human trafficking requires a "community collaborative response." When asked about any such collaboration, she advised that monthly meetings are held and that they are open to the public, unless specific cases are mentioned. She noted that January is Human Trafficking Month, and said she would forward notices about events sponsored by the county and also the State Attorney's Office.

Lastly, she advised that Ivon Mesa reports to Marie Woodson and that Ms. Woodson would be made available for further inquiry with respect to any potential conflict of interest involving referrals to or from Katariina Rosenblatt's nonprofit, There is Hope for Me.

Marie Woodson, assistant director  
Community Action and Human Services Department  
Jan. 8, 2016

Ms. Woodson advised she would help collect records pertaining to referrals made by CVAC for client services over the past two years, along with other background materials. We agreed to meet again after COE received the records and had an opportunity to look them over.

Feb. 12, 2016

Sent a follow-up e-mail to Ms. Woodson regarding requested research. After further discussion, the requested records were received on March 1, 2016. Ms. Woodson also advised Katariina Rosenblatt is a temporary employee of CVAC and not a County employee.

Katariina Rosenblatt, victim services coordinator  
Miami-Dade County CVAC

Ms. Rosenblatt did not return requests for an interview made in early March 2016. It was subsequently learned following an inspection of her personnel file on March 30, 2016, that she resigned from her County temporary employment as a Special Project Spec (SPA 2). The position, which she accepted in January 2015, paid an hourly rate of \$20.50.

Ivon Mesa, M.P.A., director  
Violence Prevention and Intervention Division  
Miami-Dade County Community Action and Human Services Department  
April 5, 2016

During an interview at her office, Ms. Mesa advised that Jorge Veitia, the complainant in this matter, had a long history with her agency and that his non-profit, The Life of Freedom Center, in some ways competed with the formation of CVAC since the agency became involved in providing assistance to victims of human trafficking. She denied allegations that Mr. Veitia had been denied information or that CVAC operated in an overly secretive manner.

Ms. Mesa advised that CVAC holds quarterly meetings that are open to the public, and showed COE a binder full of agendas and sign-in logs. She said attendance for the meetings averages around 30 to 40 people, and that because of growing interest in human trafficking the agency has started to hold the meetings at local churches to accommodate the turn-out. She said Mr. Veitia has attended meetings in the past, noting that at one such meeting he asked her when she was going to step down as chairwoman of CVAC's coalition. Mesa said that Veitia wanted to chair the coalition, but that he didn't understand that as a government agency, CVAC could not relinquish control to outside individual. "I explained to him that this (coalition) was an initiative of Miami-Dade County, not a non-profit, and we don't have any need for a board of directors... He wanted to be the chair."

Ms. Mesa said that Veitia "became a little threatened" by CVAC's involvement in human trafficking, and that his organization had lost stature since CVAC formed its coalition of 38

agencies and nonprofit partners. She noted that several years ago, when Gov. Rick Scott addressed the issue, he did so at Veitia's offices in Coral Gables, but that, during a more recent event to increase awareness for the issue, he met at CVAC's offices instead.

Mesa added that the "vetting process" Veitia referred to did not apply to him since his agency was already part of the coalition, but that it applies to new members. She said interested parties must fill out an application and then make a short presentation at the quarterly meetings to describe what services they offer human trafficking victims. She said the membership then decides whether to include them in the coalition. She said Veitia's agency had never been subject to this process and that CVAC had always sought to work closely with his group. In fact, she said CVAC offered to make him an "on-site" partner and offered him a desk and office space. She said Veitia declined the offer to establish a presence at CVAC.

Ms. Mesa further stated that with respect to Veitia's claims that CVAC was using his agency to facilitate grants from the U.S. Department of Justice, his claims were untrue. She said CVAC did have a \$400,000 grant from U.S. DOJ, but that only five of CVAC's coalition members were named in the application and that Veitia's was not one of them. She agreed to provide a copy of the grant application. She said each of the partners was selected because it provided a specific service, such as immigration assistance or psychological counseling.

With respect to Ms. Rosenblatt's employment, Mesa stated that Rosenblatt was a very good employee, but that she decided to leave in January so that she could focus on developing her own non-profit, There is Hope for Me. She said that initially she had to warn Rosenblatt not to promote her book or her agency at official meetings when she was working for CVAC, and that Rosenblatt eventually ceased to do so. Mesa said that at the time she offered her the job; Rosenblatt was complaining that she was having financial difficulties and that her only income came from the sales of her book. She said she was not aware of her having any significant outside income during the time she was employed by CVAC, and that Rosenblatt never requested outside employment. She said Rosenblatt learned a lot during her time at CVAC, including how to write grants and that she left to try to build her own agency.

Ms. Mesa said she was aware of no business relationship whatsoever between Rosenblatt's non-profit and CVAC, and cited information she provided Marie Woodson showing that all the referrals were made to CVAC coalition partners. She said Rosenblatt's non-profit is not an official partner, and has not benefitted in any way from Rosenblatt's employment. She said Rosenblatt had a history with Veitia and that Veitia, years ago, offered to be her agent and wanted to promote her book and personal story. She said that Rosenblatt declined his offer, and that they later had a falling out – prior to her accepting employment with CVAC.

On Nov. 2, COE visited CVAC's offices at 2400 South Dixie Highway at about 1:30 p.m., passing through a security checkpoint to enter. Two women were observed in the waiting area, and a receptionist replied to a request for information by providing a copy of a brochure titled "Violence Intervention and Prevention Programs." It was added to the file. (Note: The brochure highlighted residential programs Safespace and Inn Transition, but did not make mention of the complainant's organization, The Life of Freedom Center.)

Documents retrieved from the Sunbiz website show that Katarina Rosenblatt is the registered agent and president of There is Hope for Me, a not-profit corporation that has been registered with the Florida Department of State's Division of Corporations since 2011.

The link to the record was as follows:

<http://search.sunbiz.org/Inquiry/CorporationSearch/SearchResultDetail?inquirytype=EntityName&directionType=Initial&searchNameOrder=THEREISHOPEFORME%20N110000100340&aggregateId=domnp-n11000010034-7fa29dc3-32df-48c4-ad98-6d763cfd5eec&searchTerm=There%20is%20hope%20for%20me&listNameOrder=THEREISHOPEFORME%20N110000100340>

On Jan. 4, 2016, COE examined a document provided by Mr. Veitia listing his nonprofit, The Life of Freedom Center, as a member of the Miami-Dade County Human Trafficking Coalition Response Team. The center is the first of numerous organizations on the 23-page list, which includes law enforcement agencies and social service providers. Mr. Veitia's cell phone and email are provided as contact information for the center. A note at the bottom of each page of the document states: "This document is for internal use only. Please do not distribute to the public. Revised on 04/07/2015."

On March 2, 2016, COE reviewed internal records provided by Marie Woodson, assistant director of CAHS, showing that There is Hope for Me is not a recognized partner of CVAC, and has not received any referrals from CVAC for client services. (Note: The above-referenced referral records covered Fiscal Years 2013-2014 and 2014-2015.)

On March 30, COE reviewed a copy of Ms. Rosenblatt's personnel file at the offices of Ms. Woodson and learned that Rosenblatt had resigned from County service as of Jan. 14. Also included in the file was a log of her employment activities, which was added to the file.

On April 6, 2016, COE reviewed the following documentation provided by CVAC:

- A copy of the Federal grant application submitted by CVAC to assist victims of Human Trafficking. The application identified "significant partnerships" as follows: the Miami-Dade County Police Department, Americans for Immigrant Justice, Dade Legal Aid, University of Miami, and the Trauma Resolution Center.
- Copies of several strings of emails between Mr. Veitia and Ms. Mesa discussing a number of topics of concern to Mr. Veitia, including a clarification of the vetting process and an offer for his agency to become an on-site partner of CVAC.

- A notice for public meetings for CVAC's human trafficking coalition, including an upcoming meeting on April 14 at the Christ Journey church in Coral Gables.

### **Conclusion(s):**

Based on the evidence gathered to date, there does not appear to be any grounds for taking action against CVAC Director Ivon Mesa or former CVAC temporary worker Katariina Rosenblatt for alleged violations of the Citizen's Bill of Rights or the Miami-Dade County Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics Ordinance, as the findings indicate the complainant, Mr. Veitia, has had extensive dealings with CVAC and its staff and has not been excluded from participation in CVAC's affairs as part of CVAC's human trafficking coalition.

The findings suggest that differing views about how CVAC should be run and the role of coalition members such as Mr. Veitia's nonprofit are at the heart of this dispute. Ms. Mesa indicated that Mr. Veitia's organization was offered an opportunity to serve as an on-site partner, but that Mr. Veitia declined this offer. She further advised that Mr. Veitia has attended quarterly public meetings to discuss the coalition's efforts to combat human trafficking in Miami-Dade County, and that Mr. Veitia has sought to assume a leadership role.

Ms. Mesa advised that because CVAC is a governmental agency and is not run like non-profits with a board of directors, it would not be appropriate for a non-Miami-Dade County employee such as Mr. Veitia to assume the chairmanship of the human traffic coalition, which was a creation of CVAC and intended to serve the needs of human trafficking victims.

She further asserted CVAC's growing role in serving this constituency had tended to diminish the role of non-profits such as Mr. Veitia's and that he may, as a result, feel "threatened." She further advised that, with respect to a US DOJ grant for \$400,000 in funding to assist human trafficking victims, Mr. Veitia's non-profit was not one of the community partners named in the grant as providers of services. A copy of the grant application, which names those outside agencies and nonprofits, is included in the file and does not name Mr. Veitia's group.

Ms. Mesa further stated that Mr. Veitia had a personal falling out with Ms. Rosenblatt prior to her accepting a temporary position with CVAC and that this may have fueled his allegations about her alleged conflicting employment. And while there was evidence to suggest that Ms. Rosenblatt, at least initially, continued to promote her book and non-profit while acting as a temporary County employee, a review of referrals from CVAC over the past two years did not show any referrals to Ms. Rosenblatt's non-profit agency, There is Hope for Me Inc. Any private benefit obtained by her through her County employment would at most be *de minimis*.

Ms. Mesa stated categorically that Rosenblatt's non-profit was not a CVAC coalition partner and did not do any business with the agency during the time of her employment.

Because Ms. Rosenblatt is no longer employed by the County it would not seem that there is any reason to delve further into whether she should have requested authorization for outside employment relating to her non-profit. By Ms. Mesa's account, Rosenblatt was not making

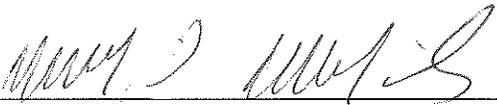
any significant income from her non-profit at the time she accepted county employment and she had no reason to think that this in any way changed during her tenure with CVAC.

After consultation with the Advocate, it was determined that this matter would be closed without further action

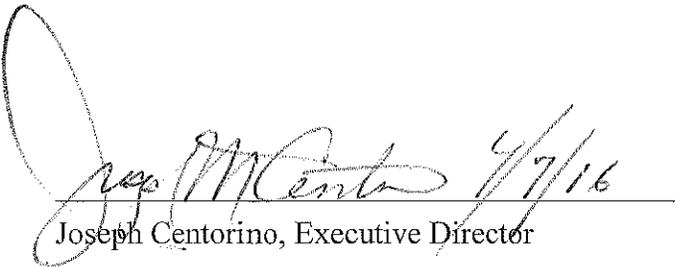


Karl Ross, COE Investigator

Approved by:



Michael Murawski, Advocate



Joseph Centorino, Executive Director