



## MEMORANDUM

To: Mary Cagle  
Miami-Dade County Inspector General

From: Michael Murawski  
Ethics Commission Advocate

Date: March 11, 2014

Re: Complaint Referral

Cc: Patra Liu  
Assistant Inspector General

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Attached please find a copy of correspondence received by this office regarding alleged mismanagement and other deficiencies within the Miami-Dade County domestic violence Safespace shelter service program.

We are referring these allegations to your office to handle as deemed appropriate.

This correspondence is being written to outline major deficiencies within the Miami-Dade County domestic violence Safespace shelter service program. It is difficult to believe that this level of incompetency exist when there is a proposed designed check and balance structure in place. First and foremost Miami-Dade County administrative management staff who is responsible for the day to day oversight of shelter operations; Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence (FCADV) the compliance entity for all certified domestic violence shelters in the State of Florida; Health Department which ensures health and safety of residential facilities within Miami Dade County and Safespace Foundation the advocate agency for Safespace domestic violence victims.

There is a repeated behavior occurring with Safespace North Shelter which defies the ethics of both Miami-Dade County and FCADV minimum standards. It appears that the shelter is being operated on co-pilot with no direction or leadership for victims to receive adequate and self-empowered service delivery. To provide a few examples.

According to FCADV Program Standards under shelter services:

- A. Every resident in shelter will be provided safe emergency shelter. Safe shelter includes, but is not limited to:
  - 1. A structurally safe building, including, but not limited to doors, windows, and other external accesses that are intruder-resistant.
  - 2. Confidentiality of stay in shelter.
  - 3. Available safety information during shelter stay.
  - 4. Emergency safety planning.
  - 5. Healthy accommodations annually inspected by local health and fire inspectors.
  - 6. The shelter shall provide all residents with food, clothing, laundry detergent, hygiene items throughout their stay. These basic needs shall be provided regardless of the victim's financial status or availability of outside resources. Efforts shall be made to provide at a minimum the basic food groups. When medical services are needed, the center will make every effort to assist shelter residents obtain these services.
  - 7. Assurance of advocate-victim privilege.

Within the last 180 days the following have occurred and been reported:

**Food:** There was expired food in the main refrigerator allocated for participants' consumption and then there was no food for program participants to eat at all. Thereby violating number six of program standards.

**Health conditions:** There is an infestation of palmetto roaches and rodents on site and the washer and dryers have been out of commission for the past three months. This definitely is an unsanitary hazardous situation for the women and children residing on site who have to cohabitate with other families. There was also a reported incident of a family having scabies but the program participants were not advised or checked out. As this is a very contagious disease. The general cleaning conditions of the facility is beyond filthy.



## **Confidentiality of Shelter Stay**

In accordance with Section 39.908, Florida Statutes, center must protect participant privacy by not disclosing the identity or location of persons in residence at a domestic violence shelter and by the restriction of visitors to the shelter. A copy of this statute shall be readily available to center staff/volunteers when confronted with confidentiality issues, for immediate reference, especially when attorneys, law enforcement or process servers are attempting to locate a victim of domestic violence.

**Confidentiality of Shelter Stay violated:** If the rule is in affect why a tow truck was allowed to come on site and take a victim's car. It is a disclosed location and staff is not supposed to confirm, deny or allow admittance on site. Not with law enforcement unless there is a search warrant or probable cause and definitely not by another business entity such as a bill collector. The victim was definitely re-victimized in this instance.

## **Accommodating Individuals with Special Needs and Special Circumstances**

### **Male survivors**

Centers shall provide equivalent services, either on site or through collaboration with other agencies, for adult males and dependent males who accompany a parent or guardian to the shelter. Shelters will maintain written protocols outlining the locations(s) and methods through which shelter, counseling and other services will be delivered to adult and minor males. Alternate housing may include hotels, safe homes, or homeless shelters for adult males.

A male whom identified himself as a transgender survivor was accepted as a resident in Safespace North. He cohabitated with women and children in the residential facility. Of course it is necessary to provide domestic violence services to all populations but it clearly states that adult men will not reside on site. For the betterment of the majority this was an inappropriate decision which was not dictated on present policy. This victim was also residing in the shelter with another program participant that he previously had an altercation with in another shelter and had pulled a weapon on her.

If this instance occurred what is to prevent the shelter from accepting homosexual men who identify themselves as females? Since this scenario has set precedence.

In the words of FCADV, the standards provide a blueprint for centers in planning, developing, implementing and improving empowerment-based domestic violence services for battered women and their children. Miami-Dade County has established policies and procedures which are governed to serve as a guide for Management and staff to effectively carry out the goals and objectives in an ethical and moral manner. When this very premise is lost by egotistical self-driven personalities, the very essence of the vision to serve domestic violence women fleeing to safety is misplaced. It is hard to believe that the collaborative partnerships Miami-Dade County, FCADV, and Safespace who have been charged with this task for the past three decades are somehow now at a loss when it comes to the provision of simple implementation of service delivery to domestic violence victims.

The true victims in this scenario are the women and children fleeing supposedly to a safe haven and having a worse experience while attempting to put their lives back in order and return to society. Obviously, there has to be a closer look at how Miami-Dade County is doing business. The Correctional and



Rehabilitative Department provides custody, care and three meals daily. It is noted with over a million dollar budget annually, service delivery should be better coordinated than this. If privatization is the goal, Miami-Dade County is still overseeing the mission and the women and children should not be the sacrificial lambs in order to achieve the big picture. They deserve to have quality services. Which mean competent leadership who can implement and capacity build others to effectively carry out the goals and objectives. It is requested that at a minimum you take a look at the information provided and make your own assessment. You owe it to the victims and constituents who pay for quality service delivery and expect that is what is being offered. Ask yourself the question if you or a family member ever needed to utilize these vital services, would you want to chance being re-victimized by a system that was established to work? Put yourself in these families predicament.

### **Distribution**

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Lucia Davis-Raiford (Community Action and Human Services Department Director); Miami Dade County Commission on Ethics and Public Trust (Executive Director); Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence (Executive Director); Miami Dade County Department of Health (Senior Administrator); Safespace Foundation (President)

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