



COMBAT Commission Meeting Minutes
May 13, 2025 10:12 AM – 12:20 PM
Hybrid Meeting

Present: Arimeta DuPree, Larry Beaty, Susan Wilson, John Sharp, Theresa Grado

Also Present: Dawna J. Shumate, Joseph Loudon, Elle Larson, Earline Lawrie, Melesa Johnson, Captain Ed Lamport, Branden Mims, Molly Manske, Marva Moses, Kisha Briggs, Jennifer Manuleleua, Lynn Rose, Ilene Shehan, Carolyn Whitney

The meeting was called to order at 10:12 AM.

APPROVE MINTUES – January 14th, 2025 & March 12th, 2025

Larry Beaty motions to approve the minutes; Arimeta DuPree seconds. The motion passes.

DISCUSSION:

Director's Report

- Dawna J. Shumate announces the retirement of Vince Ortega and confirms that the executive staff in the Prosecutor's Office is actively seeking a replacement. She also shares the sad news that Chairperson Elizabeth Williams has passed away and leads the group in a moment of silence. Funeral arrangements are available upon request, with services scheduled for Saturday, May 17th.
- Dawna J. Shumate reports that Captain Benjamin Caldwell of the Kansas City Police Department contacted COMBAT to announce the discontinuation of the D.A.R.E. program. She notes that the decision was difficult but driven by the need for more effective resource management.
 - o Commissioner Susan Wilson comments that studies have long shown the D.A.R.E. program is not an effective prevention tool. She acknowledges that its continuation was largely due to public sentiment and "curb appeal." Wilson expresses relief at the decision to discontinue it, suggesting it's time to explore better alternatives.
 - o Commissioner Theresa Grado agrees with Wilson on ending the D.A.R.E. program but emphasizes the importance of continuing to support youth. She advocates for the implementation of alternative programs and expresses her willingness to help develop or support new efforts.
 - o Dawna J. Shumate stated that she agreed with Commissioners Wilson and Grado. She clarified that most police departments are utilizing other evidence school-based prevention curriculums.
 - o Commissioner John Sharp expresses surprise at the discontinuation of D.A.R.E. but agrees that better programs are likely available. He recounts a recent South Kansas City Alliance meeting where Melesa Johnson emphasized the importance of de-escalation training. Citing alarming statistics about the rise in domestic violence homicides—from 1 in 12 last year to 1 in 3 this year—Sharp stresses that early



intervention through de-escalation education, especially at the grade-school level, could reduce future violence.

- Dawna J. Shumate explains that minor corrections were recently made to the budget, specifically to include an agency that was mistakenly left off. Despite the correction, the budget amounts remain unchanged. She clarifies that the issue has been resolved and no re-vote is necessary.
- Melesa Johnson thanks everyone for their ongoing dedication during a period of uncertainty related to the county's budget. She expresses appreciation for the continued preparation and communication among staff and agencies to ensure readiness once funds are available. Johnson also commends Dawna J. Shumate for stepping up in Vince Ortega's absence and reiterates her optimism about moving forward soon.

Presentations on COMBAT's STRiVIN' Initiative

- Dawna J. Shumate introduces the STRiVIN' presentations, noting that Branden Mims, director of the Midtown Hub, will speak on behalf of the group. Mims begins by explaining that prior to STRiVIN', victim service agencies operated in silos and lacked communication, resulting in duplicated efforts and fragmented support. He praises STRiVIN' for creating a HIPAA-compliant system that enables agencies to work together, provide wraparound services, and coordinate efforts based on each organization's strengths.

Midtown STRiVIN' Hub – Greater Impact

- Branden Mims describes the Midtown Hub's role in processing referrals for non-fatal shooting victims, evaluating cases, and either servicing them directly or connecting them with other STRiVIN' hubs. He shares the program's origin, highlights the use of the Community Care Link (CCL) system for secure coordination, and credits STRiVIN' for filling a service gap left by Kansas City Health Department's funding loss.
- Mims explains that STRiVIN' is uniquely positioned to assist with a wide range of needs—from mental health support to emergency items like diapers—through a simple referral link system. The program enables "warm handoffs" by directly connecting individuals with partner agencies and removing barriers to access. He adds that before STRiVIN', approximately 80% of non-fatal shooting victims never received follow-up support after leaving the hospital; his team now cold-calls these individuals, making proactive contact a new norm rather than an exception.
- Commissioner Arimeta DuPree, speaking from her perspective as a criminal defense attorney, highlights a recurring cycle where victims quickly become defendants due to lack of intervention. She asks: **How many of the non-fatal shooting victims actually utilize the STRiVIN' services?** Mims responds that their **initial contact rate was 24%, but it has since risen to 71%**—indicating that a growing majority of referred individuals are now receiving support either from Midtown or another STRiVIN' partner agency.
- Commissioner Susan Wilson asks: **What services are in place to prevent retaliation after shootings?** Branden Mims explains that while it's difficult to measure the absence of violence, **STRiVIN' partners with agencies like the Ad Hoc Group Against Crime to provide relocation support when a threat assessment identifies risk.** Prosecutor



Johnson played a key role in securing funds to make this possible, allowing at-risk individuals to be moved to safety and reducing the likelihood of retaliatory violence.

- Dawna J. Shumate remarked the since Commissioner Wilson was an epidemiologist, perhaps at some point, she could provide assistance in capturing that data. Commissioner Wilson stated that she was not an epidemiologist, but had been appointed to an epidemiology board.
- Commissioner Larry Beaty reflects on data shared by former prosecutor Jean Peters-Baker, estimating that 17 to 20 people in Kansas City are shot but not killed each week. He notes that without intervention, approximately 50% of these individuals either become homicide victims or commit homicides within five years due to ongoing exposure to violence and criminal environments. Branden Mims confirms the statistic and underscores the urgency of intervention to break this cycle.
 - o Commissioner Beaty acknowledges the goal of reducing the 50% post-shooting homicide risk and asks: **Can STRiVIN' agencies tap into witness protection funds for relocation efforts?** Branden Mims explains that the State of Missouri has allocated \$1 million for witness relocation, but **the approval process through Jefferson City can take 48 to 72 hours.** Due to this delay, **KCPD often refers relocation cases to other providers**, as immediate action is often necessary to ensure safety.
 - o Commissioner John Sharp acknowledges that although the State Department of Public Safety must approve relocation funding, local agencies should still take full advantage of it. He warns that unused funds may be slashed in future budgets, referencing his son, State Rep. Mark Sharp, who helped secure this funding. Sharp adds that in addition to relocation and witness protection, making timely arrests of offenders is one of the most effective ways to deter retaliation.
 - o Branden Mims points out a major barrier to justice: only about 30% of non-fatal shooting victims cooperate with law enforcement. This limited cooperation complicates efforts to follow up and provide support. He emphasizes the importance of early intervention—not just to provide services, but to show victims they are seen and supported, and potentially discouraging them from resorting to retaliation.

Northeast STRiVIN' Hub – Mattie Rhodes Center

- Molly Manske, Director of Public Safety at Mattie Rhodes Center, explains that Mattie Rhodes serves as the Northeast STRiVIN' Hub and has a 131-year history in Kansas City. The organization operates four public safety programs: a community outreach team (Para de por Paz), a community resource team, a treatment program (Nuevo Amanecer), and a school-based violence prevention initiative. These programs are staffed by individuals with lived experience and provide services including outreach, crisis intervention, counseling in Spanish and English, school mediation, and intensive outpatient substance abuse treatment. Mattie Rhodes is deeply embedded in the community, receiving referrals from KCPD, Municipal and Truancy Courts, and collaborating with schools and the justice system to support at-risk youth and Spanish-speaking residents.
- Molly Manske shares a powerful story to illustrate how Mattie Rhodes' programs work in tandem. In November, a man was fatally shot in front of his home while trying to park, with



his wife and children witnessing the incident. Mattie Rhodes' outreach team canvassed the area the next day, connected with the victim's wife, enrolled her in therapy, helped relocate the family through Ad Hoc Group Against Crime, and supported her children's school transition. Manske notes the importance of their immediate response—well before an official referral was received from KCPD—highlighting the need for proactive, community-embedded services.

- Molly Manske shares a second, deeply personal story of a 14-year-old boy who overdosed on fentanyl on his birthday. After being revived by paramedics, he was referred to Mattie Rhodes by a KCPD social worker, where he began outpatient treatment due to lack of insurance. Despite trauma—including witnessing the murder of his best friend and being shot himself—he made progress, began to dream of college, and participated in therapeutic group trips. Tragically, another best friend was killed just weeks ago, prompting the teen to tell Manske, "I think it's time to change. I have to live for them." Manske highlights how difficult it is to translate such powerful impact into data, but invites anyone to witness the outreach team's work firsthand.
- Commissioner Arimeta DuPree asks: **Has the county budget impasse impacted Mattie Rhodes' ability to pay staff?** Molly Manske responds that **Mattie Rhodes has been able to front the money to retain employees, but the long-term sustainability of that approach is uncertain.** DuPree acknowledges that some of Manske's programs are fully funded by COMBAT and emphasizes the urgency of moving the budget process forward. Manske advocates for other organizations that don't have the financial capacity to cover gaps in funding and stresses that they too deserve timely payments.

South STRiVIN' Neighborhood – Bridge Leadership Academy

- Wakisha Briggs of Bridge Leadership Academy shares that the program collaborates with Hope Hangout and serves youth in South Kansas City through leadership development, conflict resolution, and life skills. She stresses that prevention matters, citing data on the frequency of violent crimes and emphasizing that individuals committing crimes at 18–25 often start struggling much earlier. The program's goal is to reach students before they end up in the justice system by working with schools and stakeholders to reduce risk factors.
- Briggs highlights data showing that 64% of youth don't feel safe in school and 76% feel unsafe in their communities—which are findings that align with national trends. She emphasizes the importance of early prevention, education, and trauma treatment, especially as many students read below grade level. Bridge Leadership's programs boast high engagement rates and include conflict resolution training, enrichment activities, and a strong emphasis on community service and leadership.
- Since they first received STRiVIN' funding in 2023, Bridge Leadership has logged 986,000 contact minutes with youth and families. The program also reports that 95% of parents participate in activities, driven by success and intervention plans. Services include food, clothing, dignity bags, and warm handoffs to other supportive programs as youth "graduate" from the Bridge model.
- Briggs affirms the academy's holistic support model: affirming dreams, providing trauma-informed care, and embracing inclusion. Staff undergo extensive professional development, including 65+ hours of coaching, Spanish language learning to accommodate growing Hispanic participation, and training in post-traumatic growth, ACEs, and



compassionate care. A self-care requirement is also in place for staff well-being, underscoring the motto that “damaged people hurt people”—and that healing must begin with the caregivers.

South STRiVIN’ Neighborhood – Hope Hangout

- Marva Moses, founder of Hope Hangout, describes how she left her role as commissioner a decade ago to address youth crime in the 64134 ZIP code. In collaboration with police, schools, and the courts, she opened Hope Hangout near Ruskin High School to make it easily accessible to at-risk youth. The initiative led to a 63% drop in local crime the first year, achieved through afterschool engagement and personal outreach to repeat offenders.
- Moses now works directly with the most at-risk students at the Real World Learning Center, the district’s alternative school, as well as at Hilltop Residential Center and detention facilities. Her focus includes helping youth prepare for transitions—many are facing long-term detention or certification as adults. She stresses the emotional toll of seeing young people with difficult pasts heading toward incarceration and shares that she currently runs the program nearly single-handedly, aspiring to build a team to continue the work in the future.

Independence STRiVIN’ Neighborhood – Community Services League

- Jennifer Manuleleua, Senior VP of Community Development at Community Services League (CSL), explains that her organization serves Eastern Jackson County, reaching as far as Buckner and Oak Grove, with multiple locations in Independence. She describes CSL as often the only social service provider in the region and emphasizes the organization's growing role as a wraparound support system for families—many of whom report having zero or one person they can rely on during times of need. Their primary population includes single mothers and families in the Hawthorne housing development, which often houses over 2,500 residents—many of them children under 18.
 - o Manuleleua highlights the volume of young children they serve, noting that Hawthorne frequently has over 100 two-year-olds at any given time. CSL provides tiered support services based on individual needs, ranging from food and utility assistance to more complex family support systems. She stresses that meeting these needs is conditional on funding and resources but is central to helping families stabilize and thrive.
- Jennifer Manuleleua shares that in the past year alone, Community Services League prevented nearly 600 families in Eastern Jackson County from being evicted by providing rental assistance through grant funding. At their Hawthorne location, the approach is more focused on empowerment—helping residents learn to self-advocate with property management and make strategic financial decisions. CSL also offers asset-building programs to promote generational wealth, and over the past six years, they’ve helped 35 families become homeowners—a number they hope to grow significantly.
- Jennifer Manuleleua explains that CSL has formed partnerships with the police department, Hope House, and Comprehensive Mental Health to bring regular mental health support onsite, aiming to normalize and destigmatize these services. They prioritize hiring staff with lived experience to better connect with the people they serve. Manuleleua also notes demographic changes in Northwest Independence, where the Latino population has



significantly increased, prompting efforts to help families—especially parents—self-advocate for their children’s education and well-being.

- CSL has responded to shifting community needs by offering educational programs, including drug prevention and computer literacy classes in Spanish. These initiatives empower families to better engage with their children’s schooling and navigate everyday challenges. By building trust and increasing access to knowledge and resources, CSL is fostering a safer, more connected, and more resilient community.
- Jennifer Manuleleua details how CSL addresses the “benefits cliff” by helping families increase income to sustainable levels while minimizing the loss of critical supports. Through workforce training funded in part by COMBAT, CSL assists over 200 families annually in moving from \$15/hour to \$22/hour jobs using stackable certifications. They’ve also helped residents save \$1.6 million through financial programs, and they offer both public and private versions of the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program to promote long-term home ownership and retention.
- Jennifer Manuleleua closes by sharing a moving story from her early days at CSL’s Hawthorne site. In 2017, just before she started, a young mother was murdered by her domestic partner, leaving three children in the home. The children walked to school days later in bloodied shoes and told their teacher their mother had been hurt. This led to a coordinated community response.
 - Despite the trauma, the family was able to heal and progress. With CSL’s support, they became Habitat for Humanity homeowners, and the eldest child is now graduating from Van Horn High School. Manuleleua uses this story to illustrate the unique challenges of Eastern Jackson County, but also the power of resilience and long-term, wraparound support.

Independence STRiVIN’ Neighborhood – Hope House

- Ilene Shehan, Chief Operating Officer at Hope House, explains that the organization has been addressing domestic violence for 42 years and operates as part of the Independence STRiVIN’ Hub. Services include a 24-hour hotline, emergency shelter, therapy, legal aid, case management, court advocacy, housing programs, and co-response with the Independence Police Department. With STRiVIN’ funding, Hope House embedded an advocate and therapist directly in the Hawthorne community to deliver these services on-site.
- Shehan shares that more than half of all assault calls from Hawthorne were related to domestic violence, prompting the decision to embed staff there. The on-site team assists residents with everything from safety planning to restraining orders—without requiring a trip to the courthouse. These advocates also actively engage the community by conducting door-to-door outreach, organizing events, and participating in local activities to build trust and visibility.
- Referrals come through police, the Community Services League, parole officers, and—most powerfully—word of mouth from residents who have found safety through Hope House. Shehan emphasizes that survivors who’ve experienced life free from abuse are often the strongest advocates, spreading awareness and encouraging others to seek help.



Raytown STRiVIN' Neighborhood – Sisters in Christ

- Carolyn Whitney shares that Sisters in Christ began as a small pilot program serving five women, which grew into five homes now supporting women experiencing homelessness, substance use issues, and mental health challenges. The program offers housing, mental health services, case management, and educational support. Whitney celebrates the recent high school graduation of six women, aged 36 to 60, as well as a program participant who earned a degree in medical management.
- The organization also serves suspended youth, some facing long-term school exclusions of up to 145 days. Whitney recounts how the program engaged these students with mentorship and vocational experiences, including work with a lawn service and an HVAC technician. One of the boys, who had been suspended for over 180 days, is now graduating from high school—an outcome Whitney credits to their ability to offer alternatives beyond school punishment.
- Reflecting on these experiences, Whitney stresses the dangers of school exclusion without follow-up and the “pipeline to prison.” She shares the story of a ninth-grade girl who was suspended and is now barred from all districts. Sisters in Christ worked with the family to provide a homeschool solution, underscoring the importance of creative, outside-the-box thinking to keep vulnerable youth engaged in education and out of harm’s way.

Kansas City Police Department’s Report

- Captain Ed Lamport, head of the Drug Enforcement Unit at KCPD, provides an update on drug trends in the city. Methamphetamine remains the most prevalent drug, though sourcing large quantities has become more difficult—likely due to disruptions at the border. In contrast, PCP activity has increased significantly, with more seizures and incidents reported across the metro area.
 - o Commissioner Larry Beaty asks: **Why has there been an increase in PCP?** Captain Lamport replies that the **KCPD suspects the unavailability of substances from across the border and access to PCP ingredients** in other states such as Arizona, California, and Texas has prompted the shift towards PCP.
- The department has seen a decline in counterfeit oxycodone pills (M30s), but powdered fentanyl is on the rise and is directly linked to overdose cases. As of the meeting date, KCPD has investigated 104 suspected overdoses in 2025, 43 of which were fatal. This reflects a decrease from the same time in 2024, when there were 130 overdoses and 70 fatalities. Captain Lamport notes that Narcan availability has helped curb overdoses related to fentanyl.

Jackson County Drug Task Force’s Report

- Dan Cummings introduces himself as a veteran of over 40 years in law enforcement, sharing deep roots in the Hawthorne area—both as a resident and as a young officer. He recalls an early case involving a meth-addicted couple pleading for help at a time when no support systems like COMBAT were in place. Despite his best efforts, Cummings could not find treatment for them, and he continues to carry that memory decades later.
- Now leading the Jackson County Drug Task Force, Cummings emphasizes how far the system has come, noting that he can now get someone treatment the same day. He stresses, however, that drug crises cannot be resolved through treatment, rehabilitation, or



enforcement alone. He calls COMBAT a “lifesaver” for the community, affirming that he’s present not out of obligation but out of commitment to the cause. He proudly asserts that Jackson County is setting an example for the rest of the nation.

COMBAT Commissioners’ Discussion Items

- Commissioner Larry Beaty introduces several guests to the commission, beginning with Judge Jim Whitman, a former chair of the Jackson County COMBAT Commission. He praises him for continuing to advocate for COMBAT’s mission both in the courtroom and the community.
 - o Judge Jim Whitman introduces himself as a Jackson County Municipal Court Judge and reflects fondly on his connection with the commission, calling it both the starting point and culmination of his legal career. He expresses admiration for fellow members, including Arimeta DuPree and Larry Beaty, and says he’s honored to have attended such a meaningful meeting filled with powerful testimonies.
 - o Whitman shares his goal of replicating Kansas City Municipal Court’s Wellness Court model in Eastern Jackson County, noting that his unique position as a county municipal judge allows him to extend such services region-wide. He already runs a mental health court and is exploring additional specialized courts for veterans and domestic violence, aiming to broaden access to therapeutic justice programs.
 - o As a final suggestion, Whitman encourages the commission to consider holding meetings off-site at funded agencies. He recalls how impactful it was during his previous service to visit these organizations firsthand and see the community benefit in action. He recommends even a once-a-year rotation to strengthen accountability and reinforce awareness of how COMBAT funds are used on the ground.
- Commissioner Beaty also recognizes Monica Meeks, who is affiliated with the Opioid Response Network and was previously the director of Lee’s Summit CARES. He commends her as a long-time ally in the fight against addiction. Lastly, Beaty introduces Schneider, a personal friend who, along with his wife, tragically lost two sons to fentanyl overdoses.

NEW BUSINESS:

- Dawna J. Shumate stated that in light of the vacancy of a commission chair, the commission would need discuss when to elect a new chair for the Commission. She recommends holding the vote next month to ensure broader attendance and clarity on participant roles.
 - o Elle Larson mentions that quarterly hybrid meetings were scheduled at the beginning of 2025 due to the limited availability of the Legislative Chambers. However, if the only agenda item next month is the chair vote, the next Commission meeting could be conducted over Zoom. Dawna J. Shumate agrees but notes that COMBAT staff will check the availability of the Legislative Chambers. Larson proposes June 10th at 10 a.m. as the tentative date, pending confirmation.

OLD BUSINESS: N/A

MOTION:



Meeting adjourned at 12:20 PM

ANNOUNCEMENT:

Next meeting date - TBA