



CITY OF KENNER

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

MICHAEL S. YENNI
MAYOR

MICHAEL D. QUIGLEY
CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

November 3, 2014

Mr. Mike Perlstein
Managing Editor, WWL TV
1024 N. Rampart St.
New Orleans, LA 70116

Dear Mr. Perlstein:

As you know, newly appointed City Attorney Michael Power was unavailable for the meeting last Friday regarding your inquiries into the Kenner Domestic Violence Court and the classes that some defendants attend as part of a voluntary diversion process.

Upon discussing the issue with Mr. Power, he noted that he had only become aware of the classes taught by Chris Weddle about two weeks ago, and he thought it would be prudent to get an opinion from Louisiana Ethics on the matter. While Weddle is a part-time employee and had not prosecuted domestic violence cases when he began the domestic violence classes in January, Mr. Power wants an Ethics opinion to clarify whether the arrangement creates the appearance of an improper relationship.

That request is now being made, and we have been instructed the issue will be considered at a future Ethics board meeting. We will follow the board's decision on this matter. No complaints about Chris Weddle or the domestic violence classes in general have been received by the Mayor's Office. However, Mayor Yenni has expressed his concern about the form presented to defendants. The Mayor strongly opposes a process that may favor only one provider. The Mayor does not take part in the selection process of a provider for domestic violence classes and, now that he has learned that Mr. Weddle is the one provider taking advantage of the option provided in the Duluth course materials to conduct 16 classes, the Mayor has urged the City Attorney to receive an opinion from Louisiana Ethics as quickly as possible.

Many of the domestic violence defendants who rely on the Kenner Domestic Violence Court are indigent. Because defendants are charged per class, it only makes sense that many defendants would be eager to attend 16 instead of 26 classes, particularly since the 16-week course contains all of the same information. I recognize the point made by a Duluth proponent to you that the more classes the better. However, when considering the large indigent base using this court, having a 16-week option makes sense, and most likely explains why it is an option in the Duluth Curriculum that we shared with you.

Your investigation into this matter did bring key issues to light. Until your inquiry, we had not received any complaints about this court or its operation. The Mayor has instructed me and other members of the administration to take immediate action regarding the selection process for a provider in the Kenner Domestic Violence Court. We are taking the following actions:

1. City Attorney Power, Clerk of Court Tamithia Shaw and I will hold a meeting with all companies certified for domestic violence classes to hear their concerns, questions and recommendations.
2. The City Attorney and Clerk of Court are re-drafting a form used by those who rely on the Domestic Violence Court to select a provider without favoritism or the appearance of favoritism to any specific provider.
3. The City Attorney will secure an Ethics opinion regarding Mr. Weddle's status with the court and as a provider, and the Mayor has instructed us to comply with that opinion as it is written.

As you learned from our meeting, no one in this administration supports favoritism or the appearance of favoritism when it comes to the selection process for a class provider in the Kenner Domestic Violence Court. We would like for those who rely on the court to have as many choices as possible, and in as many diverse locations as possible. Our commitment to Kenner's Domestic Violence Court is strong. We are proud of the statistics: Of the 1,887 domestic violence cases since June 1, 2010, which includes 813 referred for diversion, only 165 defendants were arrested in a second domestic violence case. That means, based on four years of records, less than 1 out of 10 of our domestic violence defendants are arrested again. Our understanding is that Duluth cites a recidivism rate of approximately 50 percent. If I can assist you in any way, please let me know how. Thank you for your hard work, and we appreciate you bringing this matter to our attention.

Sincerely,



MICHAEL D. QUIGLEY
Chief Administrative Officer