



**Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE)
Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse
Advisory Board**

In-Person Meeting

**Friday, June 13, 2025
9:00 AM – 3:30 PM (EST)**

Mission Statement: Together with the citizens of Florida, we promote the safety of children and other vulnerable populations through public and private collaborations.

Meeting Minutes

Chairperson: Karen Mazzola

Welcome

Meeting begins at 9:12 AM. Quorum is established.

Roll Call

FDLE Attendees: SAC Watson, ASAC McClellan, Heather Faulkner, Dana Kelly, Rose Garrison, Mehgen Peoples, Abdel Cortez, Makenna Nix, Kylie Frantello, Megan McDonald

Board Members: Chairperson Karen Mazzola, Chief Darry Lloyd, Mr. Dan Campbell, Captain Peter Bergstresser, Major Jerry Hensley, Ms. Stephanie White, Ms. Fran Carlin-Rogers, Ms. Jessica Janasiewicz, Ms. Brandi Manley, Honorable Walt McNeil, Mr. John Pitta, Ms. Peggy Pitta, Ms. Hilary Sessions, Dr. Kim Spence, Mr. Mike Vasilinda

Organizations and Individuals Represented: Florida PTA, State Attorney 8th Circuit, Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, St. Petersburg Police Department, Florida Public Safety Institute, Elder Affairs, Florida Association of School Administrators, Office of the Governor, Leon County Sheriff's Office, Center for Autism and Related Disabilities at UCF, Mike Vasilinda Productions, impacted missing families, and private citizens

Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

Done over SurveyMonkey.

Florida Missing Children's Day Award Nominations

Citizen of the Year Award:

- There is one nomination.
- Major Hensley provides extra context, stating that the child was found in a busy main road and that a citizen calling in at the same time also witnessed the sanitation worker pulling the child out of the road.
- Chairperson Mazzola requests a motion to accept the nominee, Mr. Gillis, for the award. Ms. White moves to accept Mr. Gillis and Ms. Pitta seconds the nomination. The Board votes in favor and the motion passes.

Jimmy Ryce K9 Trailing Team of the Year Award:

- Ms. White provides clarification that the presence of water or dew can intensify scents and make tracking easier.

- She additionally explains that it can be standard procedure to attempt to establish a trail from different points.
- Regarding nominee G-4, she provides additional information that the bloodhound was only 10.5 months old, though had trained in creeks and swamps. The child walked the area frequently, making it difficult to establish a trail.
- Board members discuss nominee G-4. Mr. Vasilinda moves for the Board to accept nominee G-4 for this award. Mr. Campbell seconds the motion. The Board votes in favor and the motion passes.

School Bus Operator of the Year Award

- Board members discuss the importance with regard to the award criteria of the situational awareness of the drivers and of the difference between preventing a crash and reacting after a crash.
- Chairperson Mazzola asks for a motion to accept a nomination. Dr. Spence moves for the Board to accept nominee C-1 for the award. Ms. White seconds the motion. The Board votes in favor and the motion passes.

Law Enforcement Task Force/Team of the Year Award

- SAC Watson provides commentary on nominee H-1 stating the gravity of the situation that the child was in and that the nominee certainly prevented a tragedy.
- Ms. Morgan suggests recommending nominee H-5 for the John and Reve Walsh Award. She explains that the importance of programs that build a positive relationship between law enforcement and troubled children may make nominee H-5 a good fit for the John and Reve Walsh Award. She explains that similar programs have reduced law enforcement callouts to a particular group home with frequent runaways by over 75%.
- Board members discuss the criteria for the special awards and whether any nominees are a good fit for those categories.
- Board members discuss whether nominee H-3 or H-5 should be recommended for the John and Reve Walsh Award.
- Chairperson Mazzola recommends nominee H-1 for the Commissioner's Award.
 - Ms. Morgan suggests that though nominee H-1 prevented a tragedy, their work was well within their job description and that a nominee suggested for the Commissioner's Award should be for action that is above and beyond the call of duty.
 - Major Hensley explains the importance of the fact that Tampa City and Suwanee County had worked together in this case and that the effort to do so effectively should be considered.
- Chairperson Mazzola suggests motions to move nominee H-2 to be considered Maple's Everyday Hero Award, and to move H-3 and H-5 to be considered for the John and Reve Walsh Award. Mr. Vasilinda moves accordingly and Ms. Pitta seconds. The Board votes in favor and the motion passes.
- Chairperson Mazzola suggests a motion to accept nominee H-1 for the Law Enforcement Task Force/Team of the Year Award. Chief McNeil moves accordingly, and Dr. Spence seconds the motion. The Board votes in favor and the motion passes.

Generic Form Nominations

- Mr. Vasilinda asks where nominee I-1 had to obtain permission from in order to track the cell phone. Major Hensley explains that this could mean permission from the nominee's supervisor, or from the cell carrier, which has strict rules on when to allow law enforcement access to their location data. It may be possible for FDLE to find further information on this.
- Captain Bergstresser and Mr. Campbell emphasize how frequently the work done by dispatchers such as nominee I-1 is overlooked and how well I-1 suits the criteria for the Evelyn Williams Memorial Award.
- Chairperson Mazzola suggests a 10-minute break to allow members to go over the nominations in case others are a good fit for a special awards category.
- The Board returns from break and re-establishes quorum.

Combatting Human Trafficking Award

- Chairperson Mazzola comments that she would like to know more about the work done by nominees D-2.
- Ms. Morgan comments that the nominees interviewing the runaway teens did a lot by convincing them to disclose the details of the crime.
- Ms. Nix adds that if the Board is interested in accepting nominee D-2, FDLE would reach out to the nominator for more information on the investigation.
- Mr. Vasilinda comments that the 40 hours of surveillance work done by nominee D-3 are impressive.
- Chairperson Mazzola requests a motion to accept one of the nominees for the award.
- Mr. Campbell moves to accept nominee D-3 and Major Hensley seconds the motion. The Board tables the motion as online members are delayed in voting.
- The remaining needed vote is cast and the motion passes.
- The Board discusses the possibility of moving nominee D-1 to be considered for the Young Hero Award. FDLE may reach out to the nominator to clarify whether the child reported her exploitation herself or whether her disclosure was the result of an ongoing investigation, and to additionally establish the child's willingness to be publicly awarded given the nature of the crime.

Local Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award

- Major Hensley suggests moving nominee H-5 be considered for this award.
- Dr. Spence suggests nominee D-1 be considered for this award.
- Chairperson Mazzola requests a motion to move either of the above nominees. There is no motion.
- Chairperson Mazzola requests a motion to accept one of the nominations for the award.
- Dr. Spence moves to accept nominee E-3 and Ms. Pitta seconds the motion.
 - Dr. Spence explains that she moved for E-3 to be accepted because of the continued persistence of the nominee on this case.
 - Ms. Morgan offers additional information that the child had already been removed from the mother's care by DCF and placed with the father. She further explains that not all states respect the authority of a given state to determine custodial

authority and that New Mexico did more than they may have had to in order to assist.

State/Federal Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award

- Captain Bergstresser provides additional information that nominee F-1 has already received a state level award for his involvement in this case.
- He also explains that in his opinion, nominee F-3 is the only one who had to make a judgment of the safety of the situation he was in, and that he made the correct determination in order to preserve the life of the child threatened by the mother.
- Chairperson Mazzola entertains a motion to allow Captain Bergstresser to vote on this award. Mr. Vasilinda moves accordingly and Mr. Campbell seconds the motion. The Board votes in favor and the motion passes.
- Chairperson Mazzola requests a motion to accept a nominee for this award.
- Mr. Vasilinda moves for the Board to accept nominee F-3 for this award. Captain Bergstresser seconds the motion. The Board votes in favor and the motion passes.

Special Awards

- Currently being considered for special awards:
- Maple's Everyday Hero Award: H2, I-1, F-1, F-2, F-4, G-1
 - Major Hensley moves to accept nominee H-2 for this award; Mr. Vasilinda seconds. The Board does not have a quorum; the motion is tabled.
 - The Board establishes a quorum and votes in favor of accepting nominee H-2. The motion carries.
- Commissioner's Award: G-1, I-2, H-2
 - The Board agrees to consider nominees H-3 and H-5 for this award.
 - The Board agrees to remove nominees G-1 and I-2 from consideration.
 - Dr. Spence moves to accept nominee H-5 for this award. Mr. Campbell seconds the motion. The Board votes in favor and the motion carries.
- John and Reve Walsh Award: H-3, H-5, I-2
 - Major Hensley moves to accept nominee H-3 for this award, citing the sheer number of recoveries made over time. Ms. Pitta seconds the motion. The Board votes in favor and the motion carries.
- Evelyn Williams Memorial Award: I-1
 - Mr. Campbell suggests accepting nominee I-1 for this award first due to the lack of other nominees fitting the criteria.
 - Chairperson Mazzola entertains a motion to accept nominee I-1 for this award. Mr. Campbell moves accordingly, and Dr. Spence seconds the motion. The Board does not currently have a quorum and the motion is tabled.
 - The Board votes in favor of accepting nominee I-1 for this award. The motion carries.
- Young Hero Award
 - There is a possible late nominee, pending the nominating agency securing the family's approval. The child in question is a 6–7-year-old boy. The information will be included on the SurveyMonkey when the agency provides an update to FDLE.

Legislative Presentation by Heather Faulkner

- Ms. Faulkner summarizes the new Spectrum Alert and several House Bills that have passed which may impact missing persons and sex offender issues.
- Chairperson Mazzola requests an update on the Spectrum Alert at the Fall meeting.

Summer Newsletter Article Discussion

- The Board no longer has a quorum and the vote to approve the newsletter will be done by SurveyMonkey.
- Dr. Spence suggests adding a link to a YouTube training to the Summer Safety article; she will provide the link.
- Ms. Nix will send a digital version of the FMCD invitation to the members of the Board.
- Ms. Peoples requests that Board members with ideas for articles or the ability to write a short article contact FDLE through the FMCD email address. Finished articles as well as news stories and other information are welcome.
- Ms. Morgan suggests reaching out to Escambia County regarding their outreach program to reduce instances of juvenile runaways.
- Dr. Spence suggests an article explaining what steps are involved in recovery of a missing person.
- Mr. Campbell suggests sourcing articles from or interviewing recovered missing persons or first responders.
- Chairperson Mazzola suggests an article about victim advocates, where and how to contact them, and their importance as resources.
- A Board member suggests an article on Vinelink, which is a resource with information on sex offender registrations and criminal cases.

FMCD Update

- Mehgen Peoples explains that the FMCD Foundation is still fundraising and is in need of funds despite new donations that have come in.
- She explains that the Foundation has two new members and has increased efforts to network and solicit donations from agencies, businesses, and the public.
- The FMCD Foundation website has been updated and includes more information and increased utility. The QR code on the FMCD invitations goes to the website for RSVP.
- The national anthem contest, poster contest, and essay contest winners have been chosen.

MEPIC Alerts Update

- Ms. Peoples provides the alert statistics for January 1st through May 31st this year.

Other Business

- The suggestion to create a new award or rename an existing award to honor Terri Lynn after her passing will be put forward to the FMCD Foundation and may be addressed again at the Fall Board meeting. Members are invited to send their suggestions regarding this to the FMCD email address.
- Chairperson Mazzola suggests Ms. Peoples email a schedule of safety fairs that FDLE plans to attend so that local members can come out if interested.

- Dr. Spence mentions a conference on the prevention and treatment of sexual abuse in Orlando from September 15th-17th. She will send information to Ms. Peoples.
- Ms. Peoples invites Board members to send information on conferences to the FMCD email address for FDLE's awareness.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourns at 3:23 PM.