

# JACKSONVILLE CITY COUNCIL

**RESEARCH DIVISION**

**Noticed Meeting Mark Griffin and Amy Donofrio re Effective Youth Programming**

**Meeting Minutes**

**April 12, 2019**

**4:00 pm**

**Don Davis Room**

**First Floor, City Hall**

**117 W. Duval Street**

**Topic:** Mark Griffin and Amy Donofrio re Effective Youth Programming

**Attendance:** Mark Griffin – Task Force on Safety and Crime Reduction Chair; Amy Donofrio and Ceil Pillsbury-Schellenberg –Task Force Members; Colleen Hampsey – Council Research; Crystal Shemwell – Legislative Services

For all other attendees please see the sign in sheet

**Meeting Convened:** 4:00 pm

This was a meeting between Mark Griffin and Amy Donofrio to discuss effective youth programming. Ms. Donofrio is a teacher at Robert E. Lee High School and the creator of the EVAC Movement. EVAC is a grassroots movement of predominantly African-American young men who have channeled personal tragedies, such as losing siblings to murder, having family members incarcerated and witnessing shootings, into positive life changes.

EVAC (which is a reference to Plato’s Allegory of the Cave with ‘cave’ spelled backwards) has attracted the attention of news media beyond Jacksonville. A student from the class was featured on the front page of The New York Times. Students have gone to Washington, D.C., multiple times to speak at Senate committee hearings, a White House roundtable and meet with members of Congress. They also met former President Barack Obama when he made a stop in Jacksonville, and routinely talked with State Attorney Melissa Nelson and her top assistants. The EVAC students have also worked on juvenile-justice advocacy and successfully fought for a classmate to return to juvenile court after direct-filing with a 10 year original sentence.

The EVAC leadership class is comprised of young men who have experienced various levels of trauma. The first cohort was divided at first, but later bonded due to their shared life experiences. Out of the 13 students in the original cohort, 12 said they have had a family member spend a significant amount of time in jail. Eleven said they have been detained by police three times or more. Seven said they have been arrested. 11 had a close family member who had been murdered. Nine said they have been shot at. Eleven had seen someone shot. They have all felt the need to provide for their family financially. Ms. Donofrio has cultivated relationships with the boys in the program and witnessed life changing behavior from them as a result. Almost all of the boys have graduated from high school, many have found employment, and they have built a social support family structure and toured colleges. However the EVAC program will no longer be offered as a class option at Lee High School.

Chairperson Griffin spoke about how this program targets and impacts a portion of the youth population who most need it and who often do not access other services or programs. Pastor Griffin said that he would like to find a scalable way to replicate the EVAC class in other schools and train other teachers to follow Ms. Donofrio’s lead. It was decided that Ms. Donofrio will make a presentation about the EVAC Movement to the full task force at the next meeting. With no further business, Task Force Chair Griffin adjourned the meeting.

**Meeting Adjourned:** 5:00 pm

Minutes: Colleen Hampsey, Council Research

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Posted 4.16.19 5:00 pm

Tape: Mark Griffin and Amy Donofrio re Effective Youth Programming

Meeting - Legislative Services Division

4.12.19