

CITY OF CORAL GABLES ADVISORY BOARD ON DISABILITY AFFAIRS
CORAL GABLES HUMAN RESOURCES & RISK MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT
254 Minorca Avenue, Suite 214
Coral Gables, FL 33134
WEDNESDAY, July 1, 2026

- MEETING MINUTES -

MEMBERS	J 26	F 26	M 26	A 26	M 26	J 26	J 26	A 26	S 26	O 26	N 26	D 26	APPOINTED BY:
Jennifer Ward Sando	P	P	P	*	P	P	P						Mayor Vince Lago
Justine Chichester	P	P	P	*	P	P	P						Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Wilfredo Jauregui	Z	Z	P	*	P	Z	P						Commissioner Richard Lara
Bonnie Blaire	P	P	P	*	P	P	P						Commissioner Melissa Castro
Vanessa Bedoya	P	P	P	*	P	P	Z						Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Eddy Martinez	P	P	P	*	P	P	P						Ex-Officio Member Chamber of Commerce

Z – Zoom

*Quorum was reached

P – Present
E – Excused Absence
A – Absent
(-) – No Appointment
(*) – No Meeting

STAFF:

Jose Rodriguez – Human Resources & Risk Management – Assistant Director
Eglys Hernandez – Human Resources & Risk Management – P/T Administrative Assistant

CITIZEN ADVISORS:

Debbie Dietz, Citizen Advisor (Via Zoom)
Dr. Jennifer Durocher, University of Miami (Absent)

PUBLIC GUEST:

Mr. Phillip Church – Sitting Pretty (Producer) Via Zoom
Ms. Shawn Buller – Sitting Pretty (Actor) Via Zoom

CALL TO ORDER: Meeting was called to order at 10:00am

MEETING ABSENCE: None

MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL:

June 3, 2026

Ms. Chichester stated at last meeting, June 3, 2026, Debbie Dietz had been marked as absent, when she was present via Zoom. Ms. Chichester stated Agenda sheet needs to be updated to now reflect Clifford Friedman as ADA coordinator and not Raquel Elejabarrieta.

Motion by: Bonnie Blaire / 2nd Wilfredo Jauregui / Approved unanimously

SECRETARY'S REPORT: None

BOARD MEMBERS' REPORTS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

FIU Embrace Disability Conference – Eddy Martinez / Jose Rodriguez (Exhibit 2)

Mr. Martinez shared with the board information he received from FIU regarding upcoming Embrace Disability Conference. Mr. Rodriguez reminded board members that if one or more board members would be attending, to please advise us because that would require it be noticed. Mr. Martinez shared information regarding activities he will be conducting with Summer of Success program.

Mental Health Awareness – Ms. Vanessa Bedoya

Ms. Bedoya stated she wanted this to be something that everyone is talking about. Ms. Bedoya stated that when discussing disabilities, this should be included in the conversations.

OLD BUSINESS:

Sitting Pretty – Director Training – Ms. Justine Chichester (Exhibit 1)

Ms. Chichester provided information regarding Sitting Pretty play and how beneficial it would be to utilize it as training. Ms. Chichester presented guest present via zoom. Mr. Phillip Church, Sitting Pretty Producer, provided further information regarding this memoir written by Rebekah Taussig. Mr. Church stated when he first encountered this, his thought was to bring each of the eight chapters from the book to a play and as done so with this representation of Chapter 3, More than a Defect. Mr. Church expressed the importance of this story being shared. Mr. Church stated the two objectives currently are to get this presentation down to a forty-five-minute and a video which can be shared in schools and to advocate for representation in the arts.

Ms. Chichester stated she feels this is a great tool to be utilized as training because as an audience you leave with a sense of purpose and better understanding. Mr. Church stated that it would be best to coordinate a walk thru of purposed sight for training. Mr. Rodriguez will be scheduling sight visit.

Ms. Buller stated there is always another generation of exquisite people growing up disable or about to become disable with extremely powerful stories. Ms. Buller stated that the disability community is growing day by day and after researching further, the National Institute of Health stated that every year there are approximately eighteen thousand people who suffer spinal cord injuries, and over one million in half suffer head injury each year. Ms. Buller stated just from these two disabilities, the disabled population grows every year. Ms. Buller shared with board her personnel experience. Ms. Buller stated she believes this presentation facilitates the opportunity to review this through a social model. Mr. Church stated these three actors in play are not able people utilizing wheelchairs, they are actual wheelchair users and believe this provides a different impact on those watching. Ms. Palacio-Pike thanked everyone for information and how her son learned how to speak via music and theatre. Ms. Sando stated her daughter has utilized music as a tool to speak and express herself.

Ms. Sando asked what the difference between a medical model and a social model of disability is. Ms. Chichester explained that as a person with a disability it seems that your life is led by attending medical appointments, medical procedures, etc., and this is identified as medical model. Ms. Chichester started being part of a presentation like this, bringing disabilities into real life, seeing it as value, as part of social life is considered a social model. Ms. Blaire stated medical model to her is when many years ago the medical world said oh you have a disability, let's fix it and now we are aware it is not about fixing it, it's why the social model has become so strong. Ms. Blaire stated the use of theatre is not only inspirational, but also educational as well. Ms. Blaire stated perhaps one of the things that can be done is compile a list of books and films addressing disabilities which can be recommended to others.

Employment Pathway Summit – Mr. Eddy Martinez (Exhibit 3)

Mr. Martinez stated he has been in contact with the Chamber regarding Employment Pathway Summit. Mr. Martinez stated he has also been in contact with taskforce from Miami-Dade County Commissioner

Raquel Regalado's office. Mr. Martinez stated he is trying to coordinate who would be forefront of this project and location. Mr. Rodriguez stated the city can provide the use of the CMR. Mr. Rodriguez asked who the audience would be and Mr. Martinez stated it would be businesses from city chamber as well as other nearby chambers seeking employees who would be invited to attend. Mr. Martinez stated that at this event, employers can receive information as to benefits which are available when providing employment to people with disabilities.

Mr. Martinez asked for direction regarding who would be presenting this event. Ms. Blaire stated she believes Mr. Martinez would have a lot more flexibility working through the chamber regarding this exciting proposal.

Ms. Vanessa Bedoya stated this is a phenomenal idea and why not work with the different schools and have people with disabilities host this event. Ms. Bedoya spoke regarding city perhaps applying for grants for such events.

Mr. Rodriguez asked if there would be presentations from organizations participating and Mr. Martinez stated logistics continue to be developed. The board continued to further discuss this topic.

Adventure Day – Mr. Rodriguez

Mr. Rodriguez stated it has been concluded that for this year, Adventure Day will be hosted as usual. Mr. Rodriguez stated that the cost of Police for a Walk/Roll was approximately fifty thousand dollars.

School Community Relations Committee – Ms. Mary Palacio-Pike

Ms. Palacio-Pike stated there is not much update. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated there are openings at Coral Gables Elementary, however, they will not open an autism classroom, and she wanted to state that for the record. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated the Compact, which had disability embedded in the document, has been approved by Miami Dade County Public School Board and will be going to commission or city manager's office next. Ms. Sando stated district is going through changes. Ms. Palacio-Pike stated perhaps having Ms. Chichester would come to the next School Community Relations Committee meeting to introduce the possibility of having Sitting Pretty video presented at schools. Ms. Palacio-Pike spoke of perhaps having City of Coral Gables host a summit next year like the recent one held at Village of Key Biscayne or even extending invitation of other board members from various cities to attend the director's training schedule for October. The board further discussed this matter.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: None

NEXT MEETING: August 5, 2026

ADJOURNMENT:

Meeting adjourned at 11:02am

Motion by: Wilfredo Jaurequi / 2nd: Bonnie Blaire / Approved unanimously

EXHIBIT 1

Sitting Pretty

Coral Gables Training in October 2026

Sitting Pretty as a Coral Gables Training in October

Anyone can Google disability laws. What they cannot Google is the experience of living with a disability. Sitting Pretty brings that experience into the room.

We have trained people on ADA requirements for years. This opportunity would help leaders and professionals understand the lived experiences behind those requirements.

- Leadership trainings are most effective when participants connect emotionally, as well as intellectually.
- Rather than another traditional presentation, the City would be utilizing arts-based learning and disability-led storytelling to educate leadership.
- The role of theatre and storytelling in building understanding and challenging assumptions: The goal is not simply to teach disability laws or etiquette; it is to help leaders understand the human impact of their decisions.
- When audiences experience a story, they become participants in the learning process, rather than passive recipients of information.

Why Sitting Pretty is Uniquely Suited for Leadership Training

- The story challenges common assumptions about disability, independence, employment, education, accessibility, and belonging.
- The themes are directly relevant to municipal leadership, hiring practices, public engagement, education and accessibility planning.
- Every decision made by city leadership affects residents with disabilities, whether related to transportation, public spaces, employment, communication, recreation, education or emergency preparedness.
- The audience hears directly from people who navigate accessibility barriers every day. Understanding disability through lived experience, helps leaders make better-informed decisions.
- Many organizations use storytelling, theatre, and lived-experience presentations as leadership development tools, because they create meaningful conversations and lasting cultural change.

Observances in October

National Disability Employment Awareness Month – This is about more than hiring. It is about creating workplaces where people with disabilities are valued and are a part of the team.

Health Literacy Awareness Month – Accessibility is also communication. Information that is difficult to access creates barriers to health, safety, and

civic engagement and participation. Understanding how people receive and process information differently is a key leadership skill.

The City's Ongoing Commitment to Accessibility and Inclusion –

Traditional trainings are excellent at conveying information. Theatre and storytelling are excellent ways of conveying and understanding information. When we combine the two, we create a unique learning experience that is both informative and memorable.

Most people attend a seminar, collect the handout and move on. A performance, followed by discussion, creates conversations that continue long after the event ends. When a department head later reviews a hiring practice, plans a public event, or considers accessibility improvements, they're more likely to remember a story and a character, rather than a bullet point on a slide. So...Let's get the conversation started!

EXHIBIT 2

**FIU Embrace
Disability Conference from
Evidence to Action**



DISABILITY CONFERENCE: FROM EVIDENCE TO ACTION

Turning Knowledge Into Systems Change



SEPTEMBER 21-22, 2026



FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Modesto A. Maidique Campus (MMC)
GC Ballrooms (GC 140/150)
11200 SW 8th Street
Miami, FL 33199

REGISTER NOW!



Email:
fiuembrace@fiu.edu



Phone:
(305) 348-5377



Should you need an ADA accommodation to participate in a university event, program, or activity or need to request materials in an accessible format, please contact FIU's Office of Civil Rights Compliance and Accessibility (CRCA) at **305-348-2785** or accommodations@fiu.edu.

All requests for ADA accommodations or accessible materials for this event must be submitted to CRCA at least seven (7) days prior to the event or at the earliest possible opportunity.

DAY 1: POLICY & SYSTEMS

- Disability Policy Innovation
- Cross-Agency Collaboration
- Funding & Governance
- Systems Implementation

DAY 2: RESEARCH & PRACTICE

- Evidence-Based Practices
- Inclusive Program Models
- Data-Driven Solutions
- Measuring Outcomes
- Technology Forum

Join leaders, researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and advocates
for two days focused on **transforming evidence into system-level results**
for individuals with disabilities.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND:



Policymakers



Researchers



Health Care
Professionals



Educators



Community
Providers



Disability
Advocates



Students

Questions? Contact us!



fiuembrace@fiu.edu



(305) 348-5377

ACCESSIBLE & INCLUSIVE



ASL



Captioning



Accessible
Seating



Accommodations
Available



ADA
Compliant

[2026 FIU Embrace Disability Conference: From Evidence to Action Tickets, Monday, September 21-
Tuesday, September 22 • 8 AM-5 PM | Eventbrite](#)

EXHIBIT 3

Employment Pathway Summit

Employment Pathways Summit

A Disability Employment Month Initiative

Presented by the Coral Gables Advisory Board on Disability Affairs

OCTOBER | DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT MONTH

Built to move beyond awareness and create action.

By first identifying businesses and real employment opportunities, then connecting those opportunities with qualified support organizations and prepared candidates, Coral Gables can open practical pathways to employment for individuals with disabilities, neurodiversity and learning challenges.

WHY THIS IS DIFFERENT

- **Business-first model**
Identify participating businesses and real opportunities before candidate outreach.
- **Prepared introductions**
Organizations review opportunities in advance and prepare candidates for meaningful conversations.
- **Support around placement**
Businesses learn about training, coaching and follow-up support that can help employment succeed.

HOW THE INITIATIVE WORKS

- 1 **City support**
Mayor and Commission formally support the initiative.
 - 2 **Identify businesses**
Board, City, Chamber and advocates identify participating employers.
 - 3 **List opportunities**
Businesses share jobs, internships, shadowing or training options.
 - 4 **Review and prepare**
Employment organizations review opportunities and prepare candidates.
- Host the summit
Planned meetings, networking and public leadership program.

CITY SUPPORT REQUESTED

- 1 **Formal recognition**
Mayor and Commission support as a Disability Employment Month Initiative.
- 2 **Funding or sponsorship**
Help cover venue, event needs, outreach and program materials.
- 3 **City participation**
Leadership presence, communications support and help encouraging business participation.

Summit format

A conference-style program followed by structured employment pathway meetings and open networking.

Conference Program

City leaders, the Advisory Board, organizations and business representatives speak about the importance and goals of the initiative

Preplanned Meetings

Prepared candidates are matched with participating businesses based on real opportunities identified in advance.

Open Networking

Businesses, organizations and candidates connect for resources, introductions and next-step conversations.

PARTICIPANTS AND PARTNERS

UMANSU CARD - de Moya Foundation - Goodwill - Lighthouse for the Blind - FIU Embrace - Summer of Success - local schools, workforce programs and other disability employment partners

DESIRED OUTCOME

Coral Gables becomes a countywide model for moving Disability Employment Month beyond awareness and into measurable action.