

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item E-2
October 22, 2019
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Vince Lago
Commissioner Pat Keon
Commissioner Michael Mena (Appeared by phone)
Commissioner Jorge Fors

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Amanda Altman
Letty Ellis

Agenda Item E-2 [10:06 a.m.]

Personal Appearance by Jennifer Peña, Chief Administrative Officer for Kristi House Inc., a child advocacy center for Miami Dade County, serving child victims of abuse and sex trafficking for 25 years.

(Sponsored by Vice Mayor Lago)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: E-2, personal appearance by Jennifer Peña.

Amanda Altman: Good morning, Mr. Mayor and Mr. Vice Mayor.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Good morning.

Ms. Altman: Members of the Commission. My name is actually Amanda Altman. We had a little speaker switch at the last minute.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Oh.

Ms. Altman: I am the CEO of Kristi House, which is Miami-Dade County's nationally accredited child advocacy center. Kristi House is entering its 25th year of helping to coordinate and provide all the necessary services for children who have been the victims of trauma, primarily, sexual abuse and sex trafficking. The numbers -- the statistics that are out there are staggering. One in four girls and one in six boys will be the victims of sexual abuse before their 18th birthday. And as I'm sure you all are aware, Florida is the top -- in the top three for sex trafficking in the country. So, our services are needed now more than ever. I personally have only been with the organization for five months. I am a lawyer by profession. Most recently, I was practicing actually, Commissioner, with your brother at Fowler White Burnett. I left five months ago to pursue my passion of healing children, which is exactly what we do at Kristi House. We have six locations throughout Miami-Dade County, all the way from Homestead up to Miami Gardens. My goal is to eventually put myself out of a job hoping that there will eventually be no need for our services. But until then, we are so fortunate to have this amazing resource here in Miami- Dade County. We represent all children of Miami-Dade County, no matter where they live, no matter their status, whether they're documented, undocumented. We don't ask questions. We are simply here to help. And so, I'm coming before you today to challenge all of you to support this most important resource in Miami-Dade County. We need to get out there to get -- to build awareness. We do a lot of education and prevention outreach. We're in the school systems. I constantly come before boards and commissions, such as all of you, to do presentations. So, I challenge all of you to use Kristi House as a resource, whether we can provide some sort of education or outreach, whether you have children that need our services. We are here. We don't want to be Miami-Dade County's best-kept secret. We want to help as many children as possible. On average, we see about 1,500

children per year. I know there are more out there who need our services. And so, we're hoping that we can get the word out there that we're here. I also invite each of you to come to Kristi House. Our main -- our central office is 1265 Northwest 12th Avenue. And I will personally take you on a tour of our beautiful facility so that you can see everything that we do there.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much.

Ms. Altman: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you, Ms. Altman.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Lago: First of all, thank you. Briefly, I just want to say thank you to Ms. Altman. But I wanted to acknowledge Ms. Ellis, who's here. I would love for her to stand up. She wants to be humbly -- not come to the podium, but I would love for her just to come for one second. She came to see me during my office hours on Fridays and we were talking about other different issues. And I asked her what her involvement was in different organizations, and she talked to me a little about Kristi's House. And she talked to me about potentially doing a volunteer coordinated food drive, which I think is something that -- we live in one of the best cities, if not the best city in Miami-Dade County. And we're blessed to have so many resources. So, I thought that we would do some sort of challenge and really bring forth an opportunity to help Kristi House and all the individuals they help throughout the year with a food drive. So, I just wanted you to take a few moments just to say what you have in mind and how we can help you.

Letty Ellis: Thank you so much, Vice Mayor Lago. It's a pleasure to be here today. I haven't been in a little while. It's lovely to see old friends. I've been with Kristi House also a short amount

of time. When I retired from the City of Coral Gables, I went and taught yoga. It was needed after working for the City. But now I'm with Kristi House as a volunteer coordinator and we have six offices, as Amanda has just said. People think of our central office. I'm trying to get emergency pantries at all six locations. And so, I called upon Mayor Lago -- Vice Mayor Lago, excuse me, to help the City bring this need forward. And people think of food drives and toy drives at holiday time. And I'm trying to ask people to think about a food drive in November and December and another one in April and May so that our emergency pantry is never empty because sometimes it does look a little sparse. There's not even a bag of rice. So, I asked my -- Vice Mayor Lago to help me have the City of Coral Gables come forward to do a wonderful food drive for this holiday season.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Ms. Ellis: Thank you.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you very much. It's good to see you again.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Well deserved support from us.

Vice Mayor Lago: So, we can do -- I mean, if you guys want to just talk about it very briefly, something you can consider if you're interested in doing it and you think it'd be something that the Commission could get behind and that we can urge through our many social media outlets that we have to try to do something during Thanksgiving, during the holidays. I'd be willing to get involved in that if my colleagues deem it inappropriate.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Very good.

City Attorney Ramos: You can take a vote asking us to make them the official recipient of the food drive, if that's what you wish to do.

Vice Mayor Lago: So moved.

Commissioner Keon: I second it.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Will you call the roll, please?

Commissioner Fors: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Mena: Yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes.

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: (INAUDIBLE). Thank you.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you. Thank you for your work and your commitment.