



“I’M SORRY I CAN NEITHER CONFIRM NOR DENY THAT PERSON IS IN SHELTER”

“I’m sorry I can neither confirm nor deny that person is in our shelter” is the one phrase you will no doubt hear during your law enforcement career. This phrase alone is probably the most confusing thing an advocate or volunteer at the local domestic violence shelter will say to you. The reason this is so confusing is that the person you are looking for is the one you just dropped at that same shelter 10 minutes earlier. It could be you forgot to get a signature on a domestic violence receipt, you forgot to get a good phone number for the person or they may have left their domestic violence pamphlet in your patrol vehicle when you transported them to the shelter. No matter the reason, you know they are there so why can’t the shelter just tell you they will get the person for you?

The answer is very simple, Florida Statute 39.908 prohibits any certified domestic violence center employee and volunteer from disclosing the location of the center and information concerning a domestic violence center client



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without the client’s written consent. This statute not only protects the client’s physical wellbeing while in shelter, it also helps protect the client’s anonymity during and after their stay at the shelter. Additionally, confidentiality protects all of the other clients in the shelter so someone (many times a perpetrator) who is looking for a specific survivor cannot call the shelter, or show up, and find out who is staying there.

One thing the shelter can do is to take your name, phone number and reason for the call and if they do come in contact with the person you are looking for, they can relay the message and ask that person to call you back. This is why

it is very important to have a good working relationship with your local domestic violence center. It is also very important to understand the role of the center and to understand the laws governing confidentiality and privilege in relation to domestic violence centers and advocates.

The laws of confidentiality and privilege can be tricky, but with a general understanding it can make it a little easier for Patrol Officers to navigate the system and help keep the survivor as safe as possible and hold the offenders accountable, thereby reaching everyone’s ultimate goal.

**POLICE RESPONDED TO NEARLY TWO-THIRDS OF REPORTED
NONFATAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMIZATIONS IN 10 MINUTES OR LESS**

Bureau of Justice Statics

STATISTICS -- Statistics on Domestic Violence

NCADV Statistics

Florida Statistics

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