

REMARKS OF

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SALONI SETHI
MAYOR'S OFFICE TO END DOMESTIC AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY

on

"Home+"

February 27, 2023

Good afternoon, Chair Cabán and Members of the Committee on Women and Gender Equity. I am Saloni Sethi, First Deputy Commissioner of the Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence (ENDGBV). I am joined by Jamal Alsarraj, ENDGBV's Director of Special Projects. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about ENDGBV's Home+ program and Int. 534-A.

ENDGBV directly manages a contract portfolio of prevention and intervention programming, builds capacity for agency staff and community members to identify and respond to domestic and gender-based violence (DV/GBV) through outreach and training, and develops policies and best practices to strengthen the City's approaches to these issues. We collaborate with City agencies, over 100 nonprofit providers, community stakeholders, and people with lived experience to reduce barriers and ensure access to inclusive services for survivors of DV/GBV. This includes services like Home+.

Home+ is a citywide program that helps survivors to safely stay in their homes as an alternative to relocating or seeking shelter placement. In 2021, Home+ replaced and expanded upon the Human Resource Administration's Alternative to Shelter Program. Like the Alternative to Shelter Program, Home+ provides survivors with free personal alarm systems, but its services also include safety planning and case management to support survivor safety in their homes,

locksmith services, and referrals to ancillary services as needed. Home+ has minimal barriers to eligibility: all services are free and to participate, an individual only needs to identify as a survivor of domestic or gender-based violence and live in New York City. The program does not require any documentation of survivorship, such as police reports or orders of protection.

Currently, ENDGBV contracts with five community-based providers, one in each borough, to implement Home+. We partner with the Violence Intervention Program in the Bronx; HELP R.O.A.D.S. in Brooklyn; Rising Ground's STEPS to End Family Violence in Manhattan; Womankind in Queens; and the Seamen's Society for Children and Families on Staten Island. These organizations were chosen because they have extensive experience providing culturally specific domestic violence services to diverse populations. To obtain Home+ services, survivors can connect directly with the Home+ provider in their borough or obtain a referral through an organization or program they are already working with.

The Home+ personal alarm system is comprised of a base unit and a portable pendant. Once a survivor has completed the intake process with a Home+ provider and chooses to receive an alarm system, the Home+ provider will discuss safety concerns and risks with the survivor and establish who they would like to be notified in case of an alarm activation. This can be one or more people

or agencies, including law enforcement, trusted friends or family member, or a service provider. This information is kept confidential and transmitted to our alarm system vendor. Our alarm system vendor will ship an alarm system to the survivor's address typically within 2-3 business days. The alarm system arrives with instructions for self-installation, including a phone number for assistance. The alarm system vendor will also attempt to reach the Home+ client shortly after the expected delivery to support them through the self-installation and any questions. If the survivor has difficulty with self-installation, they can also request in-person installation by a technician.

A survivor can activate their alarm by pressing a button on the portable pendant. Once the alarm is activated, staff from the emergency response center will attempt to verify if the activation was intentional or accidental by communicating with the survivor through the alarm system's base unit or via call or text if that is the client's preference. The emergency response center will also notify the survivor's designated contacts.

Home+ locksmith services provide survivors with door and window lock changes or repairs to help survivors safely remain in their homes. Once a survivor completes an intake with a Home+ provider and chooses to receive locksmith services, our lock change vendor will schedule an appointment with the survivor

to come to their home, assess the extent of the job required, and either complete the job or set up an appointment to return if additional equipment (such as a new door) is necessary. For standard locks, the repair or replacement work is typically completed within a single visit. Home+ can facilitate 24-hour door lock replacement for basic locks when needed.

In addition to the locksmith and personal alarm system services, Home+ Coordinators can connect survivors of DV/GBV with a wide range of support and assistance, such as safety-planning, case management, and referral services to other specialized domestic violence services organizations, including those at ENDGBV's Family Justice Centers. The goal is to provide comprehensive support to survivors and help them to remain safely in their homes.

Since the launch of Home+'s personal alarm system program in October 2021, Home+ providers have received 648 requests for security pendants. Since the launch of Home+'s lock change program in the Fall of 2022, Home+ providers have received 62 requests for locksmith services. An evaluation of the Home+ program is being conducted in partnership with graduate students at NYU's Wagner School of Public Service. The evaluation is currently underway and is expected to be completed by May 2023.

Regarding Int. 534-A, ENDGBV thanks Council Member Hanif and her legislative team for their commitment to survivors and their partnership in drafting bill language that aligns with our office's current efforts to help survivors maintain safe and secure housing.

We look forward to continuing to collaborate with the Council, our sister City agencies and our community-based partners to better meet the home security needs of survivors. Thank you for the opportunity to appear here today. I welcome any questions you may have.



Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness
for Women and their Children

Testimony of Women In Need (Win) for the Committee on Women and Gender Equity February 27, 2023

Thank you to Chair Cabán and to the esteemed members of the Committee on Women and Gender Equity. We appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony and express our support for Intro 534, which would require the Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence (ENDGBV) to establish a trauma-informed program that connects eligible survivors of domestic or gender-based violence to support services.

Win is New York City's largest provider of shelter and services to families with children experiencing homelessness. In total, more than 10 percent of homeless families with children in New York City live in Win shelters. For our families and others across the country, domestic violence is a major cofactor of housing insecurity and homelessness. Nationwide, more than 80 percent of women with children who have been homeless have also experienced domestic violence, and in New York, domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness.¹ Of the 2,200 families Win housed last year, 90 percent were led by women, many of whom have entered a homeless shelter after fleeing domestic violence. Intimate partner violence also has a generational impact, and over 230,000 children living in shelters are believed to suffer from trauma associated with exposure to domestic violence.²

However, for housing insecure and homeless families, the social services and protections that New York City provides to survivors can offer life-saving support. Extending these benefits under Intro 534 to equip victims of domestic violence with advocates and funds to aid in their recovery through lock changes has the potential to have an immediate and direct impact on families and children impacted by intimate partner abuse and, overtime, to abate the rate of homelessness among survivors.

There is an unfortunate and historic correlation between homelessness and domestic violence. For our families, homelessness is often an ill-fated outcome of abuse. Victims of gender-based violence often leave their homes to decrease the risk of repeated abuse, and families may rely on homeless shelters as a safe alternative to the home they shared with their abuser. Luckily, in response to these realities, New York City has built the largest network of domestic violence programs in the country. Intro 534 will build on this legacy to launch a 2-year trauma-informed pilot program to change the entrance door locks of the dwelling units of survivors of domestic violence and provide related support services.

¹ "Homelessness in America: Focus on Families with Children," US Interagency Council on Homelessness, Washington, D.C.: September 2018. Online, https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Homeslessness_in_America_Families_with_Children.pdf (Accessed November 30, 2022)

² "The Intimate Relationship between Domestic Violence and Homelessness," The Institute for Children, Poverty, & Homelessness, October 27, 2018. <https://www.icphusa.org/commentary/the-intimate-relationship-between-domestic-violence-and-homelessness-2/> (Accessed November 30, 2022)



Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness
for Women and their Children

Sometimes, the simplest solution is also the most effective. Intro 534 is commonsense reform that will prevent repeat domestic violence and its ramifications, such as homelessness. Stipends for lock changes will keep families safely housed in their rightful homes, rather than uprooting parents and children to avoid abuse. For the eligible families this bill targets, whose households have an annual gross income between 51 and 80 percent of the area median income, the costs associated with changing a lock can be a hardship for a family already enduring immense financial and psychological burdens. Instead, Intro 534 will establish this simple safety step as a right for survivors and their families and alleviate the financial and logistical difficulty that changing locks could cause.

While the substance of Intro 534 is straightforward, its implementation is careful and adequately trauma informed. We thank the sponsors for prioritizing historically oppressed communities and targeting survivors of domestic violence who are English language learners, homeless, immigrants, disabled, queer, have a criminal history, or are a member of a community of color. Marginalized and low-income communities are disproportionately impacted by domestic violence in New York City, and systemic inequalities have impeded these communities' access to supportive services.³ Likewise, these families also experience the highest rates of homelessness.⁴ Therefore, the services and stipends offered by Intro 534 through survivor advocates and a pilot program will work to right these deep disparities in care. Additionally, we appreciate that the pilot program outlined in Intro 534 includes the voices of survivors through regular participant surveys. Only those impacted can truly assess the efficacy of support programs, and it is essential that survivors themselves measure the success of Intro 534.

Ultimately, homelessness is a complex, intersectional issue, but the steps to solve its causes can be simple. We applaud the City Council for introducing this legislation that could have an immense impact for housing insecure survivors of domestic violence and their families. Thank you also to Council Member Farías for **Resolution 475 to call on the New York state legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign legislation, to create a "purple alert system" for missing victims of domestic violence.** Tackling domestic violence is an upstream approach to homelessness, and we urge the City Council to pass the proposed legislation and combat this cofactor of homelessness.

³ Julie Wertheimer-Meier and Edward Hill, "2020-2021: Domestic Violence, Race/Ethnicity and Sex Report," NYC Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, New York, NY: September 2022. Online, <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/ocdv/downloads/pdf/2021-Domestic-Violence-Race-Ethnicity-and-Sex-Report.pdf> (Access February 27, 2023).

⁴ "DHS Data Dashboard – Fiscal Year 2022," New York City Department of Homeless Services, 2022. <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/dashboard/FY22-DHS-Data-Dashboard-Charts.pdf> (Access February 27, 2023)/

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Testimony of Michael Polenberg,
Vice President of Government Affairs, Safe Horizon

New York City Council
Committee on Women and Gender Equity
Hon. Tiffany Cabán, Chair

Oversight: The HOME+ Program
Intro. 0534-A - A Local Law in relation to establishing a program to
assist with changing door locks on the dwellings of survivors of
domestic and gender-based violence

February 27, 2023

Good morning and thank you for inviting us to testify before your committee. My name is Michael Polenberg, and I am the Vice President of Government Affairs at Safe Horizon, the nation's largest non-profit victim services organization. Safe Horizon offers a client-centered, trauma-informed response to 250,000 New Yorkers each year who have experienced violence or abuse. Safe Horizon's mission is to provide support, prevent violence, and promote justice for victims of violence and abuse, their families, and communities.

We are eager to share with the Committee on Women and Gender Equity (the "Committee") the lessons we have learned over the many years we have operated Project SAFE, through which we help crime victims throughout New York City access free lock and cylinder replacements for their homes. In FY22, Project SAFE installed 502 security devices in households across the five boroughs.

We offer these services because we know that for some survivors of intimate partner and family violence, leaving their homes is not an option. We hope our findings will help the Committee and the full Council as it considers Intro. 534-A, a bill to establish "a program to assist with changing door locks on the dwellings of survivors of domestic and gender-based violence."

Project SAFE

Safe Horizon's Project SAFE is designed to provide free lock replacement services for situations where the security of one's home has been compromised. Safe Horizon contracts with locksmiths across the city who replace these items as quickly as possible.

Project SAFE primarily assists survivors of intimate partner or family violence, though we help victims of other crimes as well. We receive referrals from a variety of sources, including the city's Family Justice Centers, District Attorneys' offices, and our Crime Victim Assistance Program and other Safe Horizon programs. Our lock change program is popular enough to where most survivors are asking for this service upfront. But if someone is relaying a narrative wherein their door seems insecure or someone causing harm has key access, then we would offer the lock change as part of safety planning.

What we have learned over the years is that while Project Safe is a lock change service, the clients we assist often also need additional case management and safety planning. Changing a lock may provide a certain level of security, but there are often other safety needs that warrant our attention. For example, is the abusive party kicking down the door? In these situations, a lock change may not be the best option, and other safety options should be explored. It's important to understand that a lock change is a small part of a much larger safety plan, and that talking with our clients about what a lock change can and cannot do may help to manage their expectations.

We have also learned that it takes a lot of legwork to manage our vendors. Invoices are not always sent to us on time (or at all), which makes it difficult to reconcile our expenses with our funders. Our contract for Project SAFE with the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ) only covers the cost of locks, which means our staff that do case management and safety planning must be paid through other contracts for victim services.

Our limited contract funding has never enabled us to provide lock or cylinder changes to everyone who requests them. Instead, we must prioritize the cases that seem the most fraught with danger.

While we engage in safety planning with all of our clients – including those who receive lock or cylinder changes and those who do not – we worry about the safety of those who reach out to us but we are unable to offer this particular service.

Reflections on Intro. 534-A

Safe Horizon applauds Council Member Shahana Hanif for recognizing the need to expand the city's capacity to provide free lock and cylinder changes for survivors of intimate partner and gender-based violence. We are grateful to all of the Council Members' staff who met with us over the past year to better understand the challenges we face in operating Project SAFE.

In reviewing Intro. 534-A, we are hopeful the Council can provide some clarification on the following points:

- Is there a specific timeframe for community-based organizations to render the lock-changing services? Both Project SAFE and the City's Home+ program have varying timelines for their services, depending on volume and the availability of third-party vendors, and may not be able to do same-day lock changes with many clients. If the City Council is contemplating same-day lock changes, sufficient resources will need to be dedicated, as these can be very expensive services.
- What does eligibility look like for survivors who are still living with the person causing harm? If the bill does not require a police report or order of protection and the person causing harm refuses to leave the dwelling willingly, this may make it difficult to perform a lock change and be in line with tenant housing laws regarding unlawful eviction.
- The bill language only covers lock changing services. Many of our clients are able to get locks changed through many avenues, including by their landlord, Project SAFE, the District Attorneys' offices, or Home+. However, there is a lack of services around door and lock repair. Locks and doors are often damaged as a result of a person causing harm trying to get into a dwelling. This can be incredibly destabilizing for our clients, who may have to flee their homes for a period of time. Additional resources towards door and lock repair in the legislation would be a useful addition.

We thank the Council again for its concern for the safety and well-being of victims of intimate partner and gender-based violence, and I am happy to respond to any inquiries you may have.

Women and Gender Hearing 2/27/23

Diane Rose Ministries
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To NYC COUNCIL WOMENS COMMITTEE
CHAIR TIFFANY CABAN
Kristan Richardson-Jordan
Kevin Riley
Althea Stevens
James Gennaro
Jennifer Gutierrez
Shahana Hanif

To Whom it may concern:

I am writing on behalf of Diane Rose Ministries National Center for Economic and Enterprise Development (NCEED) Aging Gracefully Project. An effort to enable women to experience wholeness as they age. That includes being free from harm, harassment, and violence of any kind. We do so through educating community, leadership development, and biblically based psycho educational workshops. We further aim to partner cross sectorally to build capacity for our efforts. As such, we would like to thank you for bring the topic of safety as it relates to “changing door locks” on the doors of thriving women seeking freedom from violence domestically. The ministry defines “Domestic,” as with the original legislative authority, anyplace where a person lives, works, and plays. We further define violence beyond intimate partner to include any form of violence exacted upon another that creates, as the legislative definition describes, as harm that affects one’s physical, mental, emotional and abuse of financial and material possessions as a means to intimidate, harass and or control women and girls and beyond. I cannot help but reiterate that violence, though ignored, often is experienced by our Aging Women defined as ages 50+ who often go invisible and voiceless and whose communities of support, to include the Church, lack the resources to meet their needs. Especially creating safety in their homes. Where possible, minor repairs might be offered, to include changing a lock but is not done as part of a broader safety plan that might include security systems, etc. Agencies serving 60+ communities do not use a safety lens nor does it explore these needs, create a long term plan, support and followup as need be. Not that it does not desire to, but they are not funded to and where they may be able to, they are burdened by paperwork that interferes with a fluid process. An example is a one year turn around to replace a lock, then repair a poor placement, then recommend a security system that it could not help install. Then it dropped the ball. The client has yet to feel fully secure where she lives. Though outreach to local representatives lended some relief, her security in her home remains challenging. We understand the Mayor has created a Home Plus strategy that sounds like it might meet the needs of our Aging Gracefully Community and as such, welcome an opportunity to partner with them. We further submitted testimony at last hearing to include older persons in

how you describe what is experienced to give visibility to the exploitation and harm brought upon them where they live and beyond, Especially older women. Finally, we ask that you fund those organizations charged with the task of assisting older person to be trained and a structure developed to address the needs of an ever increasing Aging population in the City whose needs are currently far from being met.

Thank you in advance for allowing me to submit this testimony on behalf of 50+ Women in New York City. We look forward to testifying at the next hearing that will hopefully explore female heads of households, work, and business ownership. We would also like to invite the Committee Members to a Meeting next week on 3/9. We will send a personal invite via email but ask that you pencil into your Calendars late afternoon 3-5. Details to follow! Thanks again

cc: Womens Caucus.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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Date: _____

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Name: Jamal Alzarraj, Director of Special Projects

Address: _____

I represent: ENDGBU

Address: _____

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Date: _____

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Name: Saloni Sethi, First Deputy Commissioner

Address: _____

I represent: ENDGBU

Address: _____

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