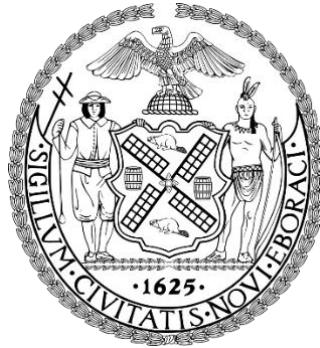


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THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

BRIEFING PAPER OF THE HUMAN SERVICES AND JUSTICE DIVISIONS

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Hon. Helen K. Rosenthal, Chair

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Donovan J. Richards, Chair

May 1, 2020

**Oversight: The Impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) on
Domestic Violence in New York City**

INTRODUCTION

On May 1, 2020, the Committee on Women and Gender Equity, chaired by Council Member Helen K. Rosenthal, and the Committee on Public Safety, chaired by Council Member Donovan J. Richards, will hold a joint oversight hearing on the *Impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) on Domestic Violence in New York City* (“NYC” or “City”). Witnesses invited to testify include the Mayor’s Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence (ENDGBV), the NYC Police Department (NYPD), advocacy organizations and other interested stakeholders.

BACKGROUND

Domestic Violence (DV) is a pattern of economic, emotional, physical and sexual abuse and other behaviors intended to exert power and control, committed against members of the same family or household or individuals who are or have been in an intimate relationship.¹ DV and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)² occur in all settings and among all cultural, religious and socioeconomic groups, but disproportionately affect women, racial and ethnic minorities³ and

¹ **Note:** Domestic violence is one part of a larger continuum of issues related to gender-based violence, which includes intimate partner violence, family violence, sexual assault, stalking and human trafficking. See NYC Mayor’s Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence (hereinafter “ENDGBV”), *Introduction to Domestic Violence & GBV* (n.d.), available at <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/ocdv/services/introduction-to-domestic-violence-and-gender-based-violence.page>; See also Mayo Clinic, *Domestic Violence against Women: Recognize Patterns, Seek Help* (Feb. 25, 2020), available at <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/domestic-violence/art-20048397>.

² **Note:** IPV is the specific subset of DV involving individuals who are married, formerly married, have a child in common or have been involved in an intimate relationship.

³ World Health Organization, *Understanding and Addressing Violence Against Women* (2012), available at http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/77432/WHO_RHR_12.36_eng.pdf?sequence=1.

members of the LGBTQ+⁴ community.⁵ Victims⁶ of DV often feel stuck in abusive relationships, as any action they take may have immediate and disruptive consequences for them and their family.⁷ For this reason, many DV victims tend to minimize or hide their abuse.⁸

Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence and Funding for DV Services

ENDGBV develops policies and programs, provides training and prevention education, conducts research and evaluations and performs community outreach around domestic and gender-based violence.⁷ ENDGBV operates the NYC Family Justice Centers (FJs), which are multidisciplinary service centers in each borough, providing social services, civil legal and criminal justice assistance for victims and survivors of domestic and gender-based violence and their children,⁹ including but not limited to safety planning, counseling, practical assistance, economic empowerment, housing/shelter advocacy and health and mental health services.⁹ Through collaboration with City agencies and community stakeholders, ENDGBV works to ensure access to inclusive services to victims and survivors and domestic and gender-based violence.⁸

⁴ LGBTQ+ is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning. Other variations of the acronym include but are not limited to other sexualities such as asexual, demisexual, genderqueer, gender fluid, graysexual, intersex, pansexual and unassigned at birth. See Michael Gold, *The ABCs of L.G.B.T.Q.I.A.+*, THE NEW YORK TIMES (Jun. 21, 2018, updated Jun. 7, 2019), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/21/style/lgbtq-gender-language.html>.

⁵ VAWnet: A project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, "The Problem: DV in LGBTQ Communities & Barriers to Safety" (n.d.), available at <https://vawnet.org/sc/rates-and-prevalence-dv-lgbtq-communities>; See also Ashley Abramson, *How COVID-19 may increase domestic violence and child abuse*, AMER. PSYCH. SOCIETY (Apr. 8, 2020), available at <https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/domestic-violence-child-abuse>.

⁶ This Briefing Paper utilizes both the terms survivor and victim to reflect that both are used in the field and the context with which they are used by the source being cited. These terms, however, can take on similar but different meanings based on the jurisdiction or organization using them. See e.g., RAINN, *Key Terms or Phrases* (n.d.), available at <https://www.rainn.org/articles/key-terms-and-phrases>.

⁷ NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, *Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)* (n.d.), available at <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/providers/resources/public-health-action-kits-ipv.page>; See also *Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in New York City* (Sept. 8, 2008), available at <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/public/ipv-08.pdf>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ ENDGBV, *2019 Annual Report on Domestic Violence Initiatives, Indicators and Factors* (2020), available at https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/ocdv/downloads/pdf/2019_Loca_Law_38_2019_Report_final.pdf.

As of the Fiscal 2021 Preliminary Plan, ENDGBV's projected budget for Fiscal 2021 totaled \$26.8 million. This included \$7.1 million for Personal Services to support for 91 staff and \$12 million in Other Than Personal Services (OTPS). The OTPS funding support legal services, abusive partner intervention, and training and outreach programming. As mentioned above, \$7.6 million supports contracts for the FJCs, which are procured through the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. The Council has advocated to create a separate office for ENDGBV, and negotiated a Term and Condition (T+C) in Fiscal 2020 that the full budget for ENDGBV be provided to the Council both 10 days after the release of the Preliminary Budget and 10 days after the release of the Executive Budget.¹⁰ As of the writing of this briefing paper, the Council has not received the T+C for the Executive 2021 Budget.

Over the last 14 years, the Council has increased its funding to domestic violence services by 145%. In Fiscal 2020, the Council increased its support for domestic violence services by \$680,000 for a total of \$12.8 million in discretionary funding. This includes \$9.8 million for the Domestic Violence Empowerment Initiatives (DoVE), \$2.5 million for the Supportive Alternatives to Violent Encounters Initiative (SAVE), and \$530,000 for the Initiative for Immigrant Survivors of Domestic Violence.¹¹

- **DoVE:** Funding supports over 100 CBOs that provide a range of services that include case management, crisis intervention, referrals, counseling, empowerment workshops, legal advocacy and referrals. \$762,500 is allocated to Safe Horizon, the administrator for this program, to serve as a liaison between the City and the community-based organizations to resolve complex administrative issues, and provides training, technical assistance, and direct services. \$1.3 million funds 26 community-based organizations that

¹⁰ The City Council of the City of New York (hereinafter "City Council"), *Fiscal 2020 Terms and Conditions* (2019), available at <https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2019/06/Fiscal-2020-Terms-and-Conditions.pdf>.

¹¹ City Council, *Fiscal 2020 Terms and Conditions* (2019), available at <https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2019/06/Fiscal-2020-Terms-and-Conditions.pdf>.

provide Citywide domestic violence services, and \$7.8 million is allocated for designations to providers by Council District.^{12,13,14,15,16,17,18}

- **SAVE:** An allocation of \$2.4 million supports four CBOs to provide comprehensive wrap-around services for domestic violence victims including prevention, community training, direct legal representation and legal advice, counseling and referrals.¹⁹
- **Initiative for Immigrant Survivors of Domestic Violence:** Funding supports nine CBOs providing services specifically for immigrant survivors of domestic violence, including interpretation, referrals, counseling, and legal representation for U Visas and T Visas.²⁰

The New York City Police Department

The NYPD is alerted to DV incidents primarily through the 911 system. When information suggesting a possible DV incident is given by a 911-caller, 911 operators dispatch a team of patrol

¹² City Council, *Report of the Committee on Finance Resolution Approving the New Designation and Changes in the Designation of Certain Organizations to Receive Funding in the Expense Budget (2019)*, available at <https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2019/07/FY20-Transparency-Reso-1-7.23.19.pdf>.

¹³ City Council, *Report of the Committee on Finance Resolution Approving the New Designation and Changes in the Designation of Certain Organizations to Receive Funding in the Expense Budget (2019)*, available at <https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2019/08/RESO-2-August-14-2019.pdf>.

¹⁴ City Council, *Report of the Committee on Finance Resolution Approving the New Designation and Changes in the Designation of Certain Organizations to Receive Funding in the Expense Budget (2019)*, available at <https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2019/09/Fiscal-2020-Transparency-Reso-3-Final.pdf>.

¹⁵ City Council, *Report of the Committee on Finance Resolution Approving the New Designation and Changes in the Designation of Certain Organizations to Receive Funding in the Expense Budget (2019)*, available at <https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2019/11/FY20-Transparency-Reso-4-Final-Report.pdf>.

¹⁶ City Council, *Report of the Committee on Finance Resolution Approving the New Designation and Changes in the Designation of Certain Organizations to Receive Funding in the Expense Budget (2019)*, available at <https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2019/12/FY20-Transparency-Reso-5-Merge.pdf>.

¹⁷ City Council, *Report of the Committee on Finance Resolution Approving the New Designation and Changes in the Designation of Certain Organizations to Receive Funding in the Expense Budget (2019)*, available at <https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2020/01/FY20-Reso-6-Committee-Report-and-Chart-Final.pdf>.

¹⁸ City Council, *Report of the Committee on Finance Resolution Approving the New Designation and Changes in the Designation of Certain Organizations to Receive Funding in the Expense Budget (2019)*, available at <https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2020/03/RESO-7-February-27-2020.pdf>.

¹⁹ City Council, *Fiscal Year 2020 Adopted Expense Budget Adjustment Summary / Schedule C (June 19, 2019)*, available at <https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2019/12/Fiscal-2020-Schedule-C-Final-Merge.pdf>.

²⁰ *Id.*

officers through a “radio run” that is coded as a possible DV-related incident. Officers respond to the scene to investigate, and if an individual makes allegations that establish a DV crime, the officers are required by law to make an arrest.²¹ While the commonly charged DV crimes, including assault, menacing, harassment and criminal contempt for violating orders of protection, are not unique to DV incidents,²² officers record whether there was in fact an allegation of a DV crime. Thus, NYPD routinely tracks the number of possible DV incidents as radio runs, and the number of victims reporting DV crimes directly to officers as complaints. In addition, NYPD records the number of DV arrests, which would differ from the number of complaints only in cases where the accused is not present at the time the complaint is made.

In 2019, between 15 and 16 percent of all felony complaints were DV related.²³ The NYPD reported 187,783 radio runs for DV related complaints in 2019, for an average of 15,649 per month and 514 per day.²⁴ Also in 2019, the NYPD reported 59 DV related murders, 8,305 DV related felony assaults, and 756 DV related rape complaints.²⁵

In addition to responding to 911 calls, NYPD also employs 400 DV prevention officers who conduct unannounced in-person check-ins to verify that orders of protection are not being violated.²⁶ The Department also contracts with Safe Horizon for \$14 million per year for the Crime

²¹ See CPL 140.10(4)

²² See, e.g., PL 120.00; PL 215.50

²³ NYPD public reporting pursuant to Local Law 38 of 2019, available at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/stats/reports-analysis/domestic-violence.page> (showing that the percentage of felony complaints that were DV related in the four quarters of 2019 ranged between 15.04% and 16.82%)

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ The New York City Police Department (hereinafter “NYPD”), *Domestic Violence* (n.d.), available at <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/services/law-enforcement/domestic-violence.page>.

Victims Assistance Program (CVAP). This program places one civilian employee as a victim advocate for DV victims in every precinct.²⁷

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND COVID-19

Domestic Violence Risks and Concerns Under Quarantine

In an effort to mitigate the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), Governor Andrew Cuomo and Mayor Bill de Blasio have instituted several measures that effectively amount to a stay-at-home order.²⁸ For DV survivors and others who are at-risk of becoming DV victims, staying home can mean being trapped with an abuser,²⁹ socially isolated and without any means for escape or support.³⁰

Due to the financial strains and the stressful nature of social distancing and quarantine measures, DV experts have warned that “rates and severity of abuse will surge as public officials and communities try to stem the spread of the novel Coronavirus.”³¹ For victims in some European countries where the pandemic struck earlier, the threat of being exposed to infection itself was “a very direct obstacle to getting help” that led victims to “decide not to seek medical attention for

²⁷ NYPD, *Crime Victim Assistance Program* (n.d.), available at <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/services/victim-services/cvap.page>.

²⁸ See New York Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, Coronavirus Press Releases (since Mar. 20, 2020), available at <https://www.governor.ny.gov/keywords/coronavirus>; see also City of New York, NYC COVID-19 Citywide Information Portal (n.d.), available at <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/coronavirus/index.page>.

²⁹ Natalie Higgins, *Coronavirus: When Home gets Violent under Lockdown in Europe*, BBC (Apr. 13, 2020), available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52216966>; Fairuz Ahmed, *Lockdown Traps Women in Domestic Violence*, THE CITIZEN (Apr. 3, 2020), available at <https://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/NewsDetail/index/7/18546/Lockdown-Traps-Women-in-Domestic-Violence>.

³⁰ Carter Sherman, *Domestic Abuse Could Spike as the Coronavirus Traps People Indoors*, VICE (Mar. 14, 2020), available at https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/epgk8z/domestic-abuse-could-spike-as-the-coronavirus-traps-people-indoors?utm_campaign=sharebutton&fbclid=IwAR2cO-FzP3py-saobQum3TZ7ciPJ2Q42L8Rhdy0tGTIU5EbyeCApb7065eo.

³¹ *Id.*; See also Scott Neuman, *Global Lockdowns Resulting In ‘Horrific Surge’ in Domestic Violence*, U.N. Warns, NPR (Apr. 6, 2020), available at <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/04/06/827908402/global-lockdowns-resulting-in-horrifying-surge-in-domestic-violence-u-n-warns>.

fear of contagion.”³² Studies have shown that abusers are more likely to murder their partners and others in the wake of personal crises, including lost jobs or major financial setbacks.³³

Given that as of April 18 COVID-19 had claimed the lives of nearly 13,000 NYC residents and over 40,000 people across the country,³⁴ there are concerns that DV victims may be experiencing the same reluctance to seek help. Indeed, preliminary NYC data suggests that call numbers to DV hotlines have fallen.³⁵ Since self-quarantine and official shutdown measures began in mid-March, NYPD has reported significant decreases in crime across almost every category of crime, including DV crimes.³⁶ However, while the number of DV crime complaints was 15.3% lower in March of 2020 than in March of 2019, the number of radio runs increased by 10%, a considerably higher percent change than other monthly comparisons.³⁷ It is not clear whether this paradoxical result is driven by reluctance or inability of complainants to report DV crimes, or is instead a true decrease in the occurrence of DV crimes. One possible theory for the increase in DV radio runs and decrease in complaints is that neighbors who are now home more often and hear arguments are calling the police more frequently.

³² Natalie Higgins, *Coronavirus: When Home gets Violent under Lockdown in Europe*, BBC (Apr. 13, 2020), available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52216966>.

³³ Amanda Taub, *A New Covid-19 Crisis: Domestic Abuse Rises Worldwide*, NEW YORK TIMES (Apr. 6, 2020), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/world/coronavirus-domestic-violence.html>.

³⁴ Mary Kay Ling, *NYC coronavirus deaths near 13,000 — but daily toll is going down*, NEW YORK POST (Apr. 18, 2020), available at <https://nypost.com/2020/04/18/nyc-coronavirus-deaths-near-13000-but-daily-toll-is-going-down/>; John Bowden, *US coronavirus death toll surpasses 40,000*, THE HILL (Apr. 19, 2020), available at <https://thehill.com/homenews/news/493600-us-coronavirus-death-toll-surpasses-40000>.

³⁵ Ashley Southall, *Why a Drop in Domestic Violence Reports Might Not Be a Good Sign*, NEW YORK TIMES (Apr. 17, 2020), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/17/nyregion/new-york-city-domestic-violence-coronavirus.html>; Debora Fougere, *Some Domestic Violence Hotlines Are Reporting a Dip in Calls. Here's Why That's Bad News*, NY1 (Apr. 6, 2020), available at <https://www.ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/news/2020/04/05/some-domestic-violence-hotlines-are-reporting-a-dip-in-calls--here-s-why-that-s-bad-news->.

³⁶ Information provided to Council by NYPD.

³⁷ NYPD Domestic Violence Reports, available at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/stats/reports-analysis/domestic-violence.page>. It is worth noting that the Governor's executive order closing many businesses was not issued until March 20.

Law Enforcement and DV Service Changes Due to COVID-19

While the cause is not clear, the decrease in DV-related complaints does not appear to be consistent with recent trends in NYPD data related to DV Rape, DV Felony Assault and DV misdemeanors. For example, January 2020 had 12.6% more felony assault complaints than January 2019, and February 2020 had 13.9% more felony assault complaints than February 2019, but March 2020 had 4.7% fewer felony assault complaints than March 2019.³⁸ Analysis of other NYPD data that contrasts with prior monthly trends suggests that the decrease in crime reporting may not be reflective of a decrease in actual DV but instead may be evidence of underreporting by victims.³⁹

DV Officers, who would normally conduct home visits, are currently unable to do so because of the risk of spreading COVID-19.⁴⁰ Therefore, they have relied exclusively on telephone check-ins. CVAP workers are also working from home and unable to meet with victims in person at precincts.⁴¹

Services for DV victims provided by ENDGBV are also limited by the COVID-19 crisis. As of March 17, 2020, the physical locations of the City's FJCs have been temporarily closed.⁴² FJC staff and certain services and support for survivors remains accessible via 311 (to be connected to the nearest FJC), by calling the FJC directly or by utilizing the City's 24-hour DV hotline (800-621-HOPE).⁴³ According to ENDGBV, the FJCs continue to provide the same services remotely

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ Information provided to Council by NYPD.

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² See ENDGBV, Family Justice Centers, available at <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/ocdv/programs/family-justice-centers.page>.

⁴³ *Id.*; See also Safe Horizon, *Call for Help* (n.d.), available at <https://www.safehorizon.org/hotlines>

that were offered in-person, including but not limited to connecting survivors to crisis support, advocacy, immediate safety planning, shelter assistance, legal consultation, counseling and through economic empowerment programs, which remain available via phone or video conferencing.⁴⁴ Other resources and support remain available for victims through various CBOs, which can be accessed via NYC HOPE (<https://nyc.gov/nychope>), ENDGBV's DV website.⁴⁵ These organizations have reported that while they have mostly been able to migrate services to the virtual realm and maintain their staff, they have ongoing concerns related to how potential budget cuts due to COVID-19 might affect their ability to provide services to survivors, around ensuring that survivors are aware of resources, and around a lack of essential needs for those in DV shelters, such as menstrual products, diapers and formula.⁴⁶

While calls to DV hotlines are down, there has been an increase in the usage of web-based resources.⁴⁷ Following the temporary closure of the FJCs, NYC HOPE has seen a major increase in web traffic.⁴⁸ Prior to the closure, the NYC HOPE website ranked an average 40 visits and six new visitors each day.⁴⁹ Since the closure, the website has seen a total of 31,228 visits and 12,009 new visitors, which averages out to 844 visits and 325 new visitors per day.⁵⁰ However, ENDGBV has reported a decrease in the percentage of new clients utilizing its services.⁵¹ On April 6, 2020,

⁴⁴ The City of New York, Domestic Violence (n.d.), available at <https://portal.311.nyc.gov/article/?kanumber=KA-01217>; NYC New York, *Domestic Violence During the COVID-19 Crisis: Where to Get Help in the Tri-State* (Apr. 3, 2020), available at <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/coronavirus/domestic-violence-during-covid-19-crisis-where-to-get-help-in-the-tri-state/2358816/>.

⁴⁵ See ENDGBV, *Resources For Survivors During COVID-19* (n.d.), available at <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/ocdv/get-help/resources-for-survivors-during-covid-19.page>.

⁴⁶ Information provided to Council by ENDGBV and DoVe participants.

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ David Cruz, *NY State Rolls Out New Discreet Method Of Reporting Domestic Violence*, Gothamist (Apr. 27, 2020), available at <https://gothamist.com/news/ny-state-rolls-out-new-discreet-method-reporting-domestic-violence>.

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ Information provided to Council by ENDGBV.

the City's COVID-19 text alert system (692-692), which went into effect on March 17, 2020,⁵² sent out its first DV-related text message urging survivors to access services via NYC HOPE, the City's 24-hour DV hotline, or 911 "for emergencies."⁵³ The DV-related text messages have since been sent weekly, and traffic to the NYC HOPE website has spiked after each one.⁵⁴

Courts and Orders of Protection

Lastly, both family and criminal courts are operating virtually in NYC,⁵⁵ which may impact the ability of victims to obtain an order of protection.⁵⁶ While criminal courts are generally operating normally with regards to orders of protection in DV cases, with slight modifications, providers have reported capacity issues with obtaining orders of protection in family courts related to limited staff, technology and scheduling limitations.⁵⁷ Representatives from the Office of Court Administration have informed the Council that family courts are hearing all requests for orders of protection.

⁵² Shant Shahrigian and Anna Sanders, *NYC Plans Coronavirus Info Cell Phone Alert Tuesday at 6 p.m.*, New York Daily News (Mar. 17, 2020), available at <https://www.nydailynews.com/coronavirus/ny-coronavirus-mobile-alert-tuesday-20200317-o4cgdu3otnbyjosh6thzlt7t3i-story.html>.

⁵³ Information gathered from received COVID 692-692 text messages.

⁵⁴ Per Committee staff conversation with ENDGBV.

⁵⁵ Rebecca Rosenberg, *Criminal and Family Court will be Held via Video Chat Later this Week*, NEW YORK POST (Mar. 23, 2020), available at <https://nypost.com/2020/03/23/criminal-and-family-court-will-be-held-via-video-chat-later-this-week/>; Dean Balsamini, *Coronavirus is Throwing Child Custody Agreements into Turmoil*, NEW YORK POST (Apr. 4, 2020), available at <https://nypost.com/2020/04/04/coronavirus-is-throwing-child-custody-agreements-into-turmoil/>.

⁵⁶ New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer, *Courts Must Take Additional Steps to Protect Domestic Violence Survivors During COVID-19 Crisis* (Apr. 3, 2020), available at <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/newsroom/courts-must-take-additional-steps-to-protect-domestic-violence-survivors-during-covid-19-crisis/>; See also NYPD, *Resources and Services: Orders of Protection* (n.d.), available at <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/services/victim-services/resources-services-orders-protection.page> (explaining that OPs are issued by a judge to protect a person experiencing abuses, harassment, threats, intimidation from the perpetrator of those actions or stop violence that is occurring within a relationship).

⁵⁷ Information provided to Council by DV providers.

Statewide DV Trends and Services

Just as the city has seen an increase in radio runs for potential DV incidents, State Police troopers responded to 1,753 DV calls, a 15 percent increase from March 2019, when there were 1,522 calls.⁵⁸ While calls to the state DV hotline also increased nearly 18 percent last month compared to February, the city hotline saw an 11 percent drop over the same period.⁵⁹ The use of Safe Horizon’s online chat service increased, so it is possible that numbers also reflect survivors utilizing other services.⁶⁰

In response to the statewide increase in DV, on April 24, 2020 the state launched a new DV text-messaging program and confidential online service,⁶¹ run by the state Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV).⁶² The new program is aimed at providing a discreet way for victims in isolation to seek help, during a time when “making a phone call to get help or accessing services may be impossible [for survivors] because their abuser can easily monitor their calls.”⁶³ The text and online services will be staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with OPDV

⁵⁸ Ashley Southall, *Why a Drop in Domestic Violence Reports Might Not Be a Good Sign*, NEW YORK TIMES (Apr. 17, 2020), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/17/nyregion/new-york-city-domestic-violence-coronavirus.html>.

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁶¹ Lisa Spitz, *New Text Line and Confidential Website for Domestic Violence Victims in NY*, CNYCENTRAL (Apr. 27, 2020), available at <https://cnycentral.com/news/local/new-text-line-and-confidential-website-for-domestic-violence-victims-in-ny>; New York State, *In Face of a Dangerous Uptick of Domestic Violence Incidents, Governor Cuomo Announces New Domestic Violence Text Program and New Confidential Online Service to Aid Victims of Abuse and Provide Potential Lifesaving Ways to Get Help* (Apr. 24, 2020), available at <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/face-dangerous-uptick-domestic-violence-incidents-governor-cuomo-announces-new-domestic>.

⁶² See New York State, *Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence* (n.d.), available at <https://opdv.ny.gov>.

⁶³ New York State, *In Face of a Dangerous Uptick of Domestic Violence Incidents, Governor Cuomo Announces New Domestic Violence Text Program and New Confidential Online Service to Aid Victims of Abuse and Provide Potential Lifesaving Ways to Get Help* (Apr. 24, 2020), available at <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/face-dangerous-uptick-domestic-violence-incidents-governor-cuomo-announces-new-domestic>.

staff who are experts in the field of domestic violence.⁶⁴ Neither NYPD nor ENDGBV currently offers similar emergency text services.⁶⁵

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

At today's hearing, the Committees will seek to understand how COVID-19 has impacted the City and State's responses to DV in NYC. The Committees hope to learn what is driving the decrease in crime complaints, and to understand the barriers that victims who are quarantined with their abusers may be facing. The Committees will address the feasibility of alternative means for DV victims to contact the police when their abusers are at home and could potentially overhear 911 calls. The Committees seek to identify an explanation for the recent increase in DV-related radio runs, despite the simultaneous decrease in DV arrests. They will also explore NYPD's mechanisms for ensuring officers comply with the state mandatory arrest policy. Finally, the Committees expect to learn how the City plans to reduce incidents of DV while COVID-19 social distancing measures are in place. This includes exploring how service providers and those programs monitored by ENDGBV can provide ongoing support to victims and survivors.

⁶⁴ New York State, *In Face of a Dangerous Uptick of Domestic Violence Incidents, Governor Cuomo Announces New Domestic Violence Text Program and New Confidential Online Service to Aid Victims of Abuse and Provide Potential Lifesaving Ways to Get Help* (Apr. 24, 2020), available at <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/face-dangerous-uptick-domestic-violence-incidents-governor-cuomo-announces-new-domestic>.

⁶⁵ Information provided to Council by ENDGBV.