

REMARKS OF

COMMISSIONER CECILE NOEL  
MAYOR'S OFFICE TO END DOMESTIC AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

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

AND

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

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

May 1, 2020

Good morning Chair Richards, Chair Rosenthal, and Members of the Committees on Women and Gender Equity and Public Safety. I am Cecile Noel, Commissioner of the Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence (ENDGBV). I am joined by Deputy Commissioner/General Counsel Elizabeth Dank and am pleased to also be here today with Deputy Chief Kathleen White, Commanding Officer of NYPD's Domestic Violence Unit. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on domestic violence in New York City.

COVID-19 puts into sharp focus the vulnerabilities that many people in our city face every day, especially domestic and gender-based violence survivors, and it highlights the barriers and challenges that we know keep people from seeking help and finding safety. Domestic violence is historically underreported and this is heightened by the pandemic, resulting in what we anticipated - a decrease in survivor engagement with service providers and with law enforcement since mid-March. While the stay at home order our City is under is critical to respond to COVID-19, we understand that home is not always a safe place. Survivors need us now more than ever in these extraordinary times, and our top priority remains to ensure continuity of services, access to resources and unwavering support. During this unprecedented challenge facing NYC and the world, ENDGBV has taken a variety of steps to provide services to survivors, engage with providers, collaborate across City agencies and publicly share information about resources.

### **Services for Survivors**

The New York City Family Justice Centers (FJCs), which are operated by ENDGBV, temporarily closed their walk-in locations on March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020 in response to COVID-19. The FJCs immediately transitioned to a remote model answering phone lines Monday to Friday, 9AM to 5PM. The phone lines are answered by ENDGBV's FJC staff and our front line city contracted staff from Safe Horizon and they are able to directly link clients across all five boroughs with crucial crisis support and advocacy by connecting survivors to FJC and community-based providers for immediate safety planning, shelter assistance, mental health services, children's counseling, legal consultations and more. Since the FJCs began operating remotely on March 18<sup>th</sup>, they have served an average of 74 clients a day, including an average of 23 new clients a day. We are encouraged to see that new clients are able to identify available resources and reach out safely for assistance.

FJC partners are working closely with us to ensure that all FJC services are provided remotely. While it is more challenging to provide services remotely to survivors who may be isolated at home with their abusive partners, our FJCs and our community-based service providers continue to do this through using creative engagement approaches that are developed with the survivor and grounded in safety and minimizing risk. When initially reaching out to survivors, our FJCs and providers first assess their ability to have a safe conversation at that time, and suggest ways to make that happen. For example, during this pandemic, providers are continuing to work with their clients to develop a code word or phrase that the survivor can use to let the provider know if it has become unsafe to continue their

conversation. This is a safety planning best practice that we have always shared in our trainings for FJC and community-based partner organizations, but it has become an even more important tool to utilize during this health pandemic. Law enforcement can also use this strategy when reaching out to survivors remotely and best practices, like these, are included in the recent guide that we shared with our partners, including the NYPD.

We have also adapted our service delivery model in light of COVID. For example, we are connecting survivors directly to our legal service partners so that they can support the survivors in drafting initial family offense petitions requesting orders of protection in the virtual Family Court parts. Through each FJC, ENDGBV staff convene the FJC partners on a weekly basis to discuss virtual operations, share best practices for safety planning and risk assessment and provide virtual training on a variety of topics. Training topics include: how to help survivors file for Family Court orders of protection remotely, updates on criminal court operations during COVID, and training on how to support survivors with safety planning.

We have also recognized that emergency funds are critical to survivors during this pandemic and are thrilled to receive a grant from Rihanna's Clara Lionel Foundation (CLF), in collaboration with Twitter and Square CEO Jack Dorsey, and JAY-Z's Shawn Carter Foundation which was secured by the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City to support unconditional micro-grants for domestic and gender-based violence survivors to ensure their safety and stability during COVID-19.

### **Publicly Shared Information**

In addition to ensuring continuity of FJC services, ENDGBV has been working to creatively connect with survivors via mobile devices and online resources. On April 6<sup>th</sup>, NYC Emergency Management released the first domestic violence related text message through the COVID-19 692-692 text system. As a direct impact of the text messages, we identified immediate increases in visits to our NYC Hope website and calls to the New York City Domestic Violence Hotline. On average, 3,200 visits to NYC Hope were received within 60 minutes of each of the four alerts that have gone out so far. These texts are scheduled to be released regularly right now and we have seen continued direct impacts to both NYC Hope and the Hotline.

ENDGBV also partnered with First Lady Chirlane McCray to release a public service announcement on April 15<sup>th</sup> to let survivors know that help is available and connect them to resources. Prior to the release of the PSA, all City agencies were given our social media toolkit, and were asked to help amplify our social media campaign. In addition, the social media toolkit has been sent to all Councilmembers; we will re-share the toolkit again immediately following this hearing. We are also regularly posting and re-posting resource information on our Twitter, Facebook and Instagram pages and have advertisements running on Facebook and Google Search. Since the social media campaign launched on April 1st, individuals accessing NYC Hope from Google and Facebook have quadrupled – from 350 prior to the campaign to 1,300 since the campaign launched. Further, we have partnered with Shared Value Media to work with 17 community-based partners to amplify ENDGBV's "We Understand" campaign on their own

social platforms with targeted messages. Finally, we will be enhancing our campaign investment to put advertisements for NYC Hope in convenience stores, check cashing locations and laundromats. We are also exploring similar messaging for pharmacies and grocery stores.

### **Collaborate with Agencies**

We know that with New York State on PAUSE, survivors, particularly those who are living with their abusive partners, have very limited opportunities to leave their home and connect with services. There are limited access points for information for many survivors right now and we are exploring all pathways for information that exist across our sister agencies programs and initiatives. For example, we are partnering with the New York City Department of Education (DOE), the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), and the Department of Small Business Services (SBS), to name a few, in identifying ways we can connect with survivors during this pandemic. We are also working collaboratively with the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ) and the District Attorney's Offices to directly support their outreach to survivors and connection to services.

### **Engagement with Providers**

We have also been regularly connecting externally with providers through multiple channels to provide open lines of communication, identify challenges, troubleshoot issues, share best practices and provide support, training and technical assistance. Provider and stakeholder engagement has included, for example, bi-weekly calls with 120+ providers led by myself, borough-based meetings with the Council-funded DOVE providers, hosting or participating in stakeholder meetings, and broad outreach to stakeholders.

We anticipate seeing both short-term and longer-term impacts of COVID-19 on survivors and will be continuing to process and analyze this in the coming months. We know that switching to remote operations has inspired ENDGBV and our providers to think creatively and innovatively about how to reach survivors and deliver services in this new way; we already know that there are some great lessons learned from this experience that will enhance some of the ways in which we provide services. As we think about what re-opening may look like, integration of new methods of service delivery will be an essential piece of that discussion.

The City is here for survivors during this crisis and beyond, and will continue to work to identify best practices and innovative approaches to enhance services and outreach. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with the Council, our sister agencies and our community partners. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to these issues. I welcome any questions that you may have.



Friday, May 1, 2020

**STATEMENT OF DEPUTY CHIEF KATHLEEN WHITE  
COMMANDING OFFICER DOMESTIC VIOLENCE UNIT  
NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT**

**BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL  
COMMITTEES ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY  
VIDEO CONFERENCE  
MAY 1, 2020**

Good afternoon Chair Richards, Chair Rosenthal, and Members of the Council. I am Deputy Chief Kathleen White, the Commanding Officer of the New York City Police Department's (NYPD) Domestic Violence Unit. I am joined here today by Assistant Deputy Commissioner for Legal Matters, Oleg Chernyavsky and the Commissioner for the Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender Based Violence, Cecile Noel. On behalf of Police Commissioner Dermot Shea, I wish to thank the Council for the opportunity to speak about the Department's efforts to combat domestic violence.

During this time of uncertainty, the NYPD's efforts to protect residents and businesses has never been more crucial than it has been over the past two months. It has been an unprecedented time in our nation's and city's history, a time when residents are depending on their first responders more than ever. While the Department has experienced significant challenges, with nearly 20% of the uniformed workforce out sick at the height of the pandemic, over 4000 members of the service having tested positive for the virus and tragically 37 members having succumbed thus far, the men and women of the Department remain committed to fulfilling our mission by, first and foremost, protecting those who are vulnerable -- those who cannot help or control their circumstances.

Among the most vulnerable are victims of domestic violence, a crime we all know to be historically underreported. Unfortunately, domestic violence continues to afflict our communities as the NYPD responds to and assists with over 240,000 "911" calls for domestic violence annually. Combating domestic violence has been, and remains, one of the Department's top priorities. But, our collective efforts to combat domestic violence are all the more important during these times of physical isolation when victims may be left alone with their abusers. Stressors such as loss of employment, financial hardship, and social isolation can exacerbate an already abusive relationship. Yet, from March 29 through April 26th, all of which was spent in lock-down, reported domestic violence index crime was down 36.5 % (618 v 973). Further, during this twenty-eight-day period, domestic violence arrests were down 43.6% (3822 v. 2157) even though radio runs were up 1.6 % (17987 v. 17699).

I want to assure you that we are not lulled into complacency with these lower domestic crime numbers. We are responding to every call for service. If we are able to develop that probable cause of a crime exists, we are making arrests. When we respond to a call for service and cannot develop probable cause of a crime we always take a Domestic Incident Report (DIR) to document the complaint and our response. All DIRs are triaged and appropriate follow-up conducted on each founded DIR by both the domestic violence prevention officers and the crime victim assistance program victim advocates of each respective precinct and police service area. My staff and I continue to closely monitor reported incidents of domestic violence in every precinct, borough and

citywide to ensure no victim slips through the cracks and to identify patterns early on so that resources could be dispatched and social services can be recommended.

In spite of the effects of COVID-19, we are endeavoring to continue unabated as best we can. We still monitor the High Propensity and Child at Risk programs. These programs allow our domestic violence prevention officers to focus on the most at-risk homes, homes where domestic violence occurred in front of the children, where there have been multiple complaints or where there are elderly individuals involved. I continue to attend weekly meetings with members of the clergy and domestic violence advocacy groups so that I can have the best possible understanding of what they are seeing and hearing. Often times people who are unwilling to speak with the police, will confide in these community advocates or leaders.

We have been reviewing hundreds of body-worn camera videos of radio runs related to domestic violence. We wanted to make sure that officers were handling these situations properly. We have been able to confirm that in all of these situations, officers responded to radio runs and services were provided as needed.

We have continued our outreach as well. Every day, I tweet about how individuals can get help. We have been sending out our DV car around to neighborhoods with high number of complaints to get the word out that help is available. I worked with Liveon NY to discuss the support that is available to domestic violence survivors. I am pleased that I was invited here today because any opportunity that we have to potentially reach survivors of domestic violence is one that I value. I encourage all the council members, as community leaders, to use their networks to continue to spread the word that help is available.

The NYPD has dedicated many resources to fighting domestic violence and our officers are committed to helping anyone who feels disconnected or vulnerable during this pandemic. Each local precinct and police service area has at least one domestic violence prevention officer. Our five hundred and twenty-five (525) NYPD domestic violence prevention officers, investigators and supervisors assist victims of domestic violence in precincts and Housing Bureau police service areas citywide. Under normal circumstances, domestic violence prevention officers visit the homes of victims, make referrals to court, offer counseling services and shelter alternatives, and help in personal safety planning.

We are continuing to work with victims to create safety tips, including (1) keeping a cellphone with you at all times; (2) developing a code word to share with children, family, friends, co-workers, when you want them to call the police; (3) staying in touch with family, friends, co-workers, by engaging in face-to-face contact via facetime, skype, phone or other social media to help stay connected, and telling family friends if they don't hear from you by a certain time to call 911; (4) identifying safe rooms in an apartment or house and avoiding dangerous situations; (5) telling children to go to a separate room for their safety and call 911; (6) making weapons less accessible, for example putting knives on a top shelf to buy more time to leave a residence if necessary; (7) planning an escape route -- where would you go, who would you call; and (8) having a go-bag in your home or at a friend's home, containing clothing, money, important documents, and medication for you and your kids.

Domestic violence prevention officers typically make nearly 200,000 home visits a year. However, in light of the Covid-19 outbreak, the domestic violence prevention officers have had to adjust their practices and have been reaching out to victims of domestic violence by telephone. These dedicated professionals and the Department as a whole is doing everything in our power to assist victims of these terrible crimes and are providing these same essential services during these trying times.

Our Crime Victim Assistance Program, a cornerstone of the NYPD's efforts to improve its response to victims of crime, staffed by Safe Horizon personnel, places two victim advocates in each of the NYPD precincts: one specializing in working with victims of domestic violence, the other serving victims of all other crimes. Victim advocates have done yeoman's work in addressing the trauma that reverberates for victims of crime, particularly domestic violence crime. Our victim advocates have also been required to alter their practices by working from home to offer and deliver services to victims during these trying times. Victim advocates can connect victims with the same array of high quality programs and services as were available prior to the outbreak. These dedicated workers have not wavered in their commitment to providing the highest quality service.

The NYPD's Domestic Violence Unit stands ready and committed to provide valuable services to those falling victim to domestic abuse. Officers are working vigorously to follow-up on reports, make arrests where appropriate, and check in on New Yorkers, including the most vulnerable population (children and elderly), amid this ongoing COVID-19 crisis, to ensure everyone is safe.

I cannot stress enough that those who are in need of assistance should reach out to the NYPD. The NYPD is continuing to respond to cases of domestic violence and remains committed to serving and assisting survivors during this challenging time. There is no need to suffer in silence. Help is available. In cases of emergency, victims should call 911. Victims seeking help can call 1-800-621-HOPE, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to get help.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about this important issue and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.



April 28, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. The mission of The Korean American Family Service Center (KAFSC) is to support and empower adults, youth, and children to lead safe and healthy lives based on dignity, compassion, and mutual respect. We are committed to preventing and ending domestic violence, sexual assault, and relationship abuse, and creating a violence-free society.

Asian Pacific Americans are by percentage the fastest growing group in New York City. Over 1.23 million Asian Pacific Americans make New York City their home, with Korean New Yorkers making up the third largest Asian ethnic group. As the population has increased, so have the needs of the Korean community as more struggle with poverty, linguistic isolation, educational challenges, and limited job prospects. KAFSC is the only organization serving Korean immigrant families who are affected by domestic violence (DV), sexual assault (SA), trafficking, and child abuse in the Tri-State area with an emphasis on the highest Korean populated areas in the borough of Queens and Manhattan, New York City. 90% of our DV/SA clients are Asian immigrants, 95% are women, and 98% have limited English proficiency. 98% of our clients live under the poverty line. Our population is disproportionately at-risk and left without a safety net in the wake of this global pandemic. Our Mayor and City Council must proactively address the challenges facing the Korean community as well as the diverse Asian Pacific American community. KAFSC presents the following recommendations as a platform for the next administration to address our community's concerns.

As a direct service organization serving the vulnerable immigrant community, **we are an essential human service provider that can not cease operating.** KAFSC continues to still be fully open to the Korean community, and we have stepped into the role of providing a myriad of services that have not normally been our target area. KAFSC continues to provide crisis intervention and COVID-19 related services to our community for small business loans, emergency fund applications, public benefits, health insurance enrollment, and more through both in-person and virtual appointments.

Our survivors are faced with inconceivable challenges during this unprecedented time — many are undocumented and work hourly at local restaurants, nail salons, and supermarkets, living paycheck to paycheck. Enforcement of social distancing and other safety measures such as shutting down schools and businesses mean that our survivors and their children are trapped at home and face additional violence and challenges. Financial difficulties compounded with social isolation exacerbates existing abusive relationships. **In fact, we are experiencing a 300% increase in calls at our bilingual 24-hr hotline in the last five weeks with 80% related to domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse.**



Furthermore, we received the recent guidance of FY 2020 Discretionary contracts. As you are aware, the City will be reimbursing discretionary contract expenses from on or before March 22nd (the date the Governor put a pause on "New York"). Expenses after the 22nd will only be reimbursed if they are "essential work". KAFSC needs immediate support to ensure our work will be fully and accurately reimbursed as an essential services provider during the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic and the resulting New York State on PAUSE.

The essential direct services we provide to an already marginalized and vulnerable community are critical for the survival of Korean American New Yorkers and will be even more so in the aftermath.

### **Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, and Human Trafficking Program for the Immigrant survivors**

KAFSC is entering our 31st year of offering an array of effective services to Asian Americans and who have survived domestic violence (DV), sexual assault, relationship violence, human trafficking, or child abuse. We educate communities throughout the City about DV and enlist them in combating sexual violence. In addition, our agency both addresses the immediate needs of families who have recently suffered DV and helps DV victims to progress toward safe, self-sufficient, and rewarding lives. The requested Speaker's Initiative will support the full gamut of programs that we already maintain and a significant expansion of services beginning in 2020. The full range of services include below:

#### EXISTING DIRECT SERVICES

KAFSC delivers DV services from two offices, one in Flushing, Queens and one in Bergen County, New Jersey. Both sites are readily accessible to all City neighborhoods by train, bus, or car.

- New York City's only 24 hours-per-day, 7 days-per-week bilingual (English/Korean) DV hotline. In 2018-2019 the hotline staff responded to more than 2,500 calls by furnishing crisis intervention, safety planning, referrals to shelters (including KAFSC's own Rainbow House), and referrals to law enforcement and legal service agencies.
- Professional, holistic, bilingual, and culturally informed individual and group counseling for DV victims of all ages.
- Rainbow House, the City's only emergency shelter focused on serving Asian American DV victims. In 2019, 19 women and 2 children benefited from safe housing, on-site therapy, assistance in accessing public benefits, monthly legal clinics, one-on-one legal counseling, advocacy in court, medical services, emergency cash, free transportation, and translation services.
- Transitional housing and childcare subsidies for families who are recovering from DV and making strides toward physical, emotional, and economic independence. All participants who



graduated from this component last year had already secured safe, permanent housing and remunerative jobs promising career advancement.

- Diverse services that equip DV survivors to progress toward economic self-sufficiency: basic and advanced English courses, computer classes, job readiness education, job skills training, one-on-one job counseling, and financial literacy workshops. 190 women benefited from these programs in 2018-2019.
- Therapeutic counseling, health education, assistance with immigration issues, and job training for Asian American victims of human trafficking. This component coordinates closely with the Human Trafficking Intervention Court in Queens.
- Sponsorship of the Youth Community Project Team (YCPT), which hones the leadership skills of high school students dedicated to combating DV and achieving positive changes in their communities. Last year our 50 YCPT members spearheaded the creation of the Queens Youth Collaborative linking Asian American youth groups throughout the Borough. 27 YCPT participants earned US President's Volunteer Service Awards.
- A host of other youth programs targeting teenagers and children who have suffered or witnessed DV: two afterschool centers which operate every school day, two summer camps, mentoring from responsible adults and older college students, and arts projects which build resiliency among young women.
- Evidence-based parenting training which discourages child abuse by instilling constructive, effective childrearing skills in mothers and fathers.

KAFSC's direct services, which are delivered in English or Korean, are culturally appropriate. For example, residents of the Rainbow House emergency shelter take comfort in being served familiar Asian meals and in receiving such traditional healing services as acupuncture.

### **Rainbow House Shelter Operations**

The requested FY2021 discretionary funds will be used towards the 24/7 operation of KAFSC Rainbow House Emergency Shelter, which was acquired through a historical merger with the former Rainbow Center five years ago. This critical emergency service is the only-one-of-its-kind directly known and accessible to the NYC Korean community and a scarce resource in Queens.

New York City operates a system of over 40 emergency domestic violence shelters with a total capacity of 2,228 beds. The NYCHA Domestic Violence Priority system, intended to make its units available to DV victims, is largely inadequate. New York City is facing an unprecedented homelessness crisis and runs out of the shelter, not to mention culturally-specific shelters in Queens. The first 48 hours after leaving an abuser is critical and one of the most immediate, crucial needs for a victim of domestic violence is finding a safe place to stay. With 67% of the 200,000 Koreans in NYC residing in Queens, 71% of whom are foreign-born, and domestic violence a prevalent issue (some studies showing 60% of Korean immigrant women were battered), culturally accessible services are critically needed.



KAFSC strives to address this need through its culturally competent shelter services. Located confidentially in Flushing, Queens and 24/7 fully staffed all times, our Rainbow House provides short-term housing and round-the-clock support services to Korean/Asian survivors and their children. It serves as a vital doorway for them to a safe space from which they can access culturally familiar food/hot meals, legal assistance, counseling, and bilingual, bicultural staff who provide comprehensive services with cultural sensitivity.

### **Economic Empowerment Program**

KAFSC seeks continuation funding for our already successful Economic Empowerment Program, most of whom are immigrants and many of whom are recovering from domestic violence (DV). Our goal is empowering immigrants and victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking by helping them become more financially and economically independent. To this end, KAFSC's Economic Empowerment Program offers classes (Digital Literacy, ESOL, Custom Tailor and Alteration, and Cosmetologist Workshop), employment counseling (resume building, cover letter writing, interview & Business English skills, and job search skills), and Wear-4-Work (W4W) (business clothing closet).

### **Children and Youth Programs**

The Korean Americans and other Asian Americans whom KAFSC serves are at significant risk of maltreating children. Many Asian Americans subscribe to Confucian traditions granting parents (notes appear at the end of this draft) "almost inviolable authority to raise and discipline their children." Family relations are hierarchical, unquestioned obedience is expected of children, and parents often resort to physical punishment. Korean American "immigrants (are) not familiar with common positive discipline strategies in the United States". Consequently, they risk legal entanglements with the child welfare system. Asian Americans are often cut off from extended families who traditionally educate young parents about child development. The families we reach suffer a range of tensions – low incomes, unemployment and underemployment, language barriers, uncertain immigration status, isolation, conflicting degrees of acculturation between parents and children, inadequate housing – which may exacerbate any tendency toward CA.

For the past 30 years our agency has focused on reducing DV. "There is a proven link between domestic violence and child abuse." 65% of DV perpetrators also abuse children, and 30-60% of households beset with DV experience child maltreatment as well. In Korean American families the most common source of emotional abuse among children is witnessing DV.

90% of the people KAFSC reaches are Korean Americans or other Asian Americans. 85% are females. Virtually all those we benefit have low incomes; most are immigrants with limited English. Our programs have traditionally concentrated on the large Asian American community in Queens. Last year, we launched our second center in Bergen County, New Jersey. KAFSC's services are available to anyone regardless of age, sexual orientation, or physical ability.



During 2020-2021 KAFSC's **Child Abuse Prevention and Intervention Program (CAPIP)** will continue to: 1) teach Asian American parents about positive child rearing practices and about avoiding CA, 2) educate the broader Asian American community about CA and mobilize residents to combat the maltreatment of children, and 3) offer culturally competent therapy to parents at serious risk of CA. CAPIP will thus address all four of HFC's impact areas: decreasing risk, reducing trauma, building individual strengths, and strengthening families.

CAPIP's direct services will target Korean American and other Asian American families who have suffered or are at serious risk of CA. While the program will be available to children (3-10 years old), youth (11 to 18 years old), and adults in all parts of the Tri-State Area, most participants will live in Queens. In its first 4 years CAPIP positively impacted 128 children and youth and 154 adults. CAPIP's community education and mobilization efforts sponsored will reach Asian Americans of all ages throughout the Tri-State Area.

Parents will gain: 1) more accurate and more detailed information about child development, 2) education about strength-based alternatives to corporal punishment and CA, 3) reduction of family tensions that can lead to CA, and 4) enduring relations with KAFSC staff people and other parents who will support positive child-rearing. Some parents will avoid having their children placed in foster care. Through the community education and mobilization component, Asian Americans in all portions of the Tri-State Area will come to better appreciate the extent and seriousness of CA in their community and will join in effective prevention efforts. Finally, adults, children, and youth who receive therapy will benefit from lessened risk of maltreatment, adoption of constructive strategies for raising children, and more satisfactory family lives.

- **Hodori "Little Tiger" Afterschool Program\* (School Year: Mon to Fri, 3 to 6pm; Summer: Mon to Fri, 9 to 5pm)**

The afterschool is designed to provide holistic support to children (ages 5-13) from low-income families through creative enrichment activities and academic development programs that focus on building self-esteem and identity, improving communication and social skills.

The Hodori program is designed to help children, all from low-income, immigrant, and working families, build self-esteem and improve communication and social skills by engaging therapeutic, creative, and academic activities that are culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate, in a safe and healthy environment. Hodori is greatly interconnected with the vitality of our mission by serving as an early intervention point. All of our students are immigrants or children of low-income immigrant families. Caregivers lack in understanding of navigating the U.S. education system as well as understanding of school culture in general. Therefore, these students have a lack of parent support and are surrounded by high-stress home environments, which produce low self-esteem, frustration, and aggressive behaviors – all of which make an impact on our students' academic performance and overall growth. With a large Asian Pacific



American (APA) community presence in New York City, these youth need a safe, culturally sensitive, and linguistically competent afterschool program where they can learn and grow, while their parents are at work or in transition. The Hodori Program's strength is in its unique design to holistically address the special social, cultural, and linguistic needs of children and immigrant families. Based on New York City's youth development framework, we provide holistic support to these children through creative enrichment activities and academic development programs that focus on building self-esteem and improving communication and social skills.

Hodori holistically addresses the social, cultural, and linguistic needs of our students. We help them to build self-esteem and improve social and creative skills through creative enrichment and academic development components.

Parental involvement is a key part of the design and delivery of the Hodori program. Hodori staff continually engages parents on a regular basis to ensure parent knowledge of student progress and follow up with special needs of the families. Our staff provides semiannual Parent-Teacher Conferences and parenting education workshops. Senior Director of Programs, Ms. You, who is a bilingual New York State Licensed Mental Health Counselor and a part-time Children Counselor/bilingual Art Therapist, will offer individualized and group counseling and art therapy to students on site during the after-school.

- **Youth Community Project Team (YCPT), Unni-Hyung (Big Sister-Big Brother) Mentoring Program, and Project GOAL (Girls Own Artistic Leadership)**

These programs are uniquely designed to empower Korean/Asian and immigrant youth from low- and moderate-income families through year-around service- learning project, leadership opportunities, and community activism.

Asian youth face unique cultural and generational needs that are often unaddressed and misunderstood by schools, after-school programs and citywide programming. The “model minority” myth often masks the reality that exists as a repercussion of felt pressure from societal Asian stereotypes, communication struggles within immigrant families and cultural expectations — depression, high potential to not graduate, drug addictions, and bullying. Our youth programs provide meaningful leadership roles and an outlet for positive and effective communication with peers, counselors and mentors. Through our culturally competent program and engagement of youth in creating positive community change, KAFSC works to debunk the “model minority” stereotype that often encumbers Korean American youth.

YCPT is a youth leadership-building program that provides a safe and empowering space for Korean/Asian American youth (ages 13-18) to mobilize the community and become engaged and positive change makers, through active service-learning combined with leadership and advocacy opportunities. YCPT also seek to raise awareness of teen dating violence and sexual



violence among peers and in the greater community. The core purpose of YCPT is to develop leadership, positive-self-esteem and a healthy bicultural identity that embraces both Korean/Asian and American cultures. In the process of planning and implementing projects, youth research the community and gain an understanding of its needs, and mature as responsible citizens who make a positive impact on the community.

Our Unni-Hyung "big sister-big brother" program matches middle and high school students with young professionals who provide companionship and guidance. Through careful recruitment, screening, and background checks of potential mentors, youngsters are matched with caring individuals who serve as both friend and role model. These positive relationships enabled the mentors to help their little brothers and sisters to broaden their interests, cope with identity issues, improve self-esteem and develop school and career goals.

Project GOAL (Girls Own Artistic Leadership) develops leadership skills, self-esteem, and healthy identities in 14- to 18-year-old young women, specifically targeting young women of color, through artistic expression, critical thought, technical skill-building, and community engagement. Under the guidance of an experienced Youth Program Counselor, participants assume leadership roles and governing voices in designing and creating media arts projects concerning issues in their community. The young artists also examine cultural expectations and values about gender, sexuality, and intimate relationships.

I urgently ask for your support for KAFSC and the essential work we provide to the vulnerable and marginalized members of our community. **Any and all efforts must be made to ensure a fair and equitable budget FY21 Executive Budget that prioritizes investment in community organizations that are supporting the most marginalized and will continue to do so in the aftermath.** The work of KAFSC is critical in order to continue to provide the necessary programs and services to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse especially during this challenging time.

Thank you and the Committees for your consideration of this testimony. I can be reached at [jeehae.fischer@kafsc.org](mailto:jeehae.fischer@kafsc.org) or (917) 885-6590.

Public safety can be improved by slowing cars down on side streets to under 10mph, giving out speeding tickets and/or fines when cars are speeding, giving out tickets and/or fines when cars go through red lights, creating protected separated biking lanes, creating more bumpouts, replacing streetlights with traffic circles. Generally biking should be encouraged. More bicyclists will make it safer for all bicyclists because car drivers are generally courteous and the main problem is that they do not expect to see bicyclists.

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**City Council of the City of New York  
Committee on Contracts  
Testimony Submitted by: Margarita Guzman, Executive Director  
Friday, April 1, 2020  
1:00pm**

Chairs Gibson and Louis, and esteemed members of the Woman’s Caucus of the New York City Council, I thank you for creating this opportunity to come before you today to share our insight about a hidden and dangerous byproducts of the covid pandemic – the increase in severity and frequency of domestic violence.

Normally, I would begin by introducing myself and my organization. But I would like to begin, not with my name, but the name of Tania Gonzalo. I say her name so that all of us here can lift her spirit and do justice to her memory. On Sunday, April 19, 2020, Tania Gonzalo was found unconscious and unresponsive inside her apartment on East 105th Street in East Harlem. Police had just responded to a 911 call about a “dispute” she was having with her partner. She had been strangled to death. She was 48 years old.

My name is Margarita Guzmán and I am the Executive Director of the Violence Intervention Program (VIP). VIP is the only culturally-specific non-profit organization in New York City serving Latina/o/x survivors of domestic and sexual violence, the vast majority of whom are low-income immigrants. VIP operates three community-based social service programs, two residential housing programs, including an emergency shelter, a 24/7 hotline as well as innovative economic justice and sexual violence projects. In addition, VIP’s Communications and Outreach program connects the hidden population of immigrant survivors to needed resources, provides youth

prevention education workshops centering the experiences of immigrant youth and organizes a community of survivor-activists based on the promotora model of peer education and outreach popular throughout Latin America. All of VIP's offices are located in heavily Latina/o/x, low-income immigrant communities in East Harlem, Bronx and Queens.

In FY 2019, VIP served a total of 1,483 clients, over 93 percent of whom are cis-gender women and over 75 percent are Latina/o/x. Over two-thirds are immigrants (predominantly from Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Ecuador) and 23 percent have resided in the US less than five years. 59 percent report Spanish as their primary language. 73 percent of our clients have at least one child, and nearly all of our clients earn below 80 percent of the median area income, with 74 percent reporting a household annual income of less than \$15,000. Prior to the COVID 19 outbreak, more than 51 percent report they are unemployed, 9 percent of whom reported they were unemployed due to domestic violence. We know unemployment numbers have spiked in the last two weeks and will continue to worsen during shelter in place and social distancing protocols in place.

VIP's robust Communications and Outreach Program reaches over 10,000 people in our target communities every year at community fairs, churches, schools, health care facilities, special events and through local businesses. In Fiscal Year 2019, we reached 10,366 individuals through community outreach efforts, participated in 375 outreach activities, and gave out 38,690 outreach materials. VIP works hard to make sure that hidden populations of Latinx immigrants victimized by domestic and sexual violence are not left out of the national movement for gender justice.

Our current operating budget is just over \$5.38M, with approximately \$2M allocated for rental expenses for our scattered site shelter program and operation of our transitional housing program.

We have a roster of 56 staff, 95% of whom are Latinx, 85% of whom are women, and many of whom have disclosed that they themselves are survivors of domestic and/or sexual violence.

All of VIP's services are in jeopardy. Every single one of those survivors, along with all of their children, are in danger of going unseen, unheard and unserved. The problem is not a lack of dedicated workers, or a lack of expertise. It's not even because immigrant women are hard to reach – we can and do reach them with great success. It is the threat of losing funding that goes to some of the most necessary work for any domestic violence provider – a strategic and culturally relevant outreach team. This could not be happening at a worse possible time.

When Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, a study was conducted on the incidence and impact of intimate partner violence related to the disaster.<sup>1</sup> It was the first population-based study that ever documented the prevalence of IPV in a region before and after a major disaster. It found that there was a 35% increase in the prevalence of psychological victimization and a 98% increase in physical victimization for women. It also concluded:

The findings of this study have important implications for intervention efforts following large-scale disasters. First, the findings suggest that information about IPV resources should be disseminated to affected populations, so that women and men who experience IPV for the first time following a disaster will know where to turn for help and information. Similarly, shelters, hotlines, and other existing resources should be appropriately staffed to handle a potential influx of inquiries.

Every single person testifying before you today - and so many more who cannot do so - are speaking with one voice and delivering one message: there is a slowly simmering crisis of

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<sup>1</sup> Schumacher, Coffey, Intimate Partner Violence and Hurricane Katrina: Predictors and Associated Mental Health Outcomes, *Violence Vict.* 2010;25(5):588–603. doi: 10.1891/0886-6708.25.5.588. [[PMC free article](#)] [[PubMed](#)] [[CrossRef](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)]

domestic violence happening in this city right now. It is a public health issue that pre-dated COVID 19 by centuries, but that is being intensified by the pandemic. It would be so very wise to listen to us. If not us, then please reference the research on this issue, which I have attached to my written testimony. We cannot turn our backs on survivors right now.

I don't know if VIP's outreach would have ever reached Tania Gonzalo, but we know it will reach thousands. And that in those thousands, it will reach people in her situation – people whose lives could be saved. But we can't save any lives, if we cannot tell them we are here to help them.

I am here to ask you to fulfill the City's commitment to those lives, and the safety of some of New York's poorest and most vulnerable communities. We look forward to working with this esteemed body and the City to continue to reach out to all the people trapped in abusive homes. Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have, and I can be reached at [mguzman@vipmujeres.org](mailto:mguzman@vipmujeres.org), or 212-410-9080, ext. 102.

Data referenced in the foregoing testimony:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7152912/>

<https://www.nj.gov/dcf/home/Domestic%20Violence%20and%20Disasters%20with%20Sources.pdf>

**Testimony:** Amy Barasch, Executive Director

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

**Cohosted:** Committee on Women and Gender Equity and Committee on Public Safety

**Date:** May 1, 2020

Thank you Chair Rosenthal, the Committee on Women and Gender Equity, Chair Richards, the Committee on Public Safety, and other members of the Council. I am Amy Barasch, the Executive Director of Her Justice, a nonprofit organization that stands with women living in poverty in New York City. For 27 years, justice for women living in poverty has been the core of why Her Justice exists. In 2019 alone, Her Justice provided a range of legal help to more than 4,000 women and 5,000 children living in poverty in New York City in the areas of family, matrimonial and immigration law. Our service delivery model makes us unique: our small legal department of 21 (who speak 10 languages other than English) recruits, trains and then serves as virtual mentors to volunteer attorneys from the best firms across the City. These volunteer lawyers then stand side-by-side with women who would otherwise have to navigate the complex legal system on their own. We use a 21-person legal unit to mobilize hundreds of lawyers who deliver more than \$41 million worth of legal services every year.

Our clients are the working poor, with very limited resources. They live in all five boroughs of the City. More than half of our clients are foreign-born, a quarter of them need interpreters in court, and most are mothers who are, or become, the heads of their households. More than 75% of our clients are victims of domestic violence.

**In this crisis, our unique model has positioned us to be able to pivot quickly and smoothly to provide services remotely, leveraging private volunteerism to prepare clients to engage with the courts when they open.** Our civil legal services are essential services, preventing greater crises for people living in poverty down the road. We recognize the severe shortage of lawyers available for low-income New Yorkers. In the civil courts, that burden falls with disproportionate weight on women who represent the bulk of the unrepresented in family and divorce matters. Her Justice offers information, advice, brief services and full representation in support, custody and visitation, and order of protection matters in Family Court; divorces in Supreme Court; and immigration matters under the Violence Against Women Act in Federal proceedings. We offer representation for many of the cases other legal services organizations do not have the bandwidth to take on – child and spousal support matters, and litigated divorces, for example. Our staff responds to half of the women who contact us with a broad array of legal advice, review of papers, and tools to ensure they get the best outcomes they can on their own. The other half of the women who contact us receive free full representation on their case for as long as it takes. The majority of these cases - 80% - are handled by volunteer attorneys from the City's premiere law firms, with rich assessment, triage, mentoring, training and support from our staff. The remaining 20% of the cases are handled in-house to ensure that we retain the necessary flexibility to respond to emergency situations, navigate particularly complex or lengthy legal issues, and stay fully engaged in the legal issues on which we train and provide support.

Support from the City Council helps Her Justice to provide direct representation and skilled advocacy in an arena that often fails to adequately serve the legal needs of the poor and, in particular, the many women who are survivors of domestic violence. The current public health crisis has exposed the access-to-justice gap in new ways. In this crisis, as in ordinary times, legal services are essential services. Every day, our staff attorneys provide women with information about the legal remedies available to them and advise and strategize with clients to help them weigh their options and decide the course that is right for them and their children. Our staff trains and mentors pro bono attorneys who continue to fight for the legal rights of our clients

as the need for legal assistance for people living in poverty deepens in this crisis. While our services to clients may look different in some ways during this time of court closures, the need for legal support for domestic violence victims is as real and urgent as ever.

I would like to take the opportunity to highlight two key areas of the impact of COVID-19 on domestic violence in New York City: the need for essential legal services to domestic violence victims for civil court matters, even while the courts are closed; and the additional barriers to justice for immigrant survivors of domestic violence during this public health crisis.

### **1. The need for essential civil court legal services to victims of domestic violence in New York City**

Many of our clients must engage with the New York City Family Courts to get legal relief that is critical to their safety and well-being; for example, orders of protection, financial support from partners, or clear schedules for access to children. As you may know, the New York Family Courts are operating with limited capacity during this public health crisis. We know that it is safest for all – court personnel, attorneys, and litigants alike – to remain at home at this time and we appreciate the substantial challenge of providing broad access to the courts for all New Yorkers in need. The New York Family Courts are currently providing virtual access for certain types of matters that have been deemed “essential,” including emergency family offense petitions and applications for temporary orders of protection, and are accepting applications by orders to show cause related to urgent matters in pending cases. While we understand that the court administration plans to roll out virtual access for other kinds of matters, with prohibitions on the filing of new family and matrimonial matters, some critical court relief is unavailable to domestic violence victims at this time. And, while orders of protection can be vital for some victims, for many clients who already have orders of protection, with NYPD resources being stretched in the current crisis, they may be unable to follow up on complaints when abusers have fled the scene.

**Domestic violence is not only physical abuse.** As the Council knows, domestic violence takes many forms beyond physical abuse. Many of our clients experience financial abuse – the control by one intimate partner of the other’s access to economic resources, which diminishes the victim’s capacity to support themselves and forces them to depend financially on the abuser. In general, consumer debt and low credit scores trap women in poverty. These financial barriers may impose particular challenges if the debt arose from partner abuse, such as the withholding of assets, identity theft, and coercive debt. Debt and damaged credit as a result of financial abuse make it even more difficult for victims to leave the relationship – with a low credit score, women cannot rent an apartment, get a job or buy a house or car.

Like all those living in poverty, our clients who are victims of domestic violence find themselves in a precarious situation at this time. While court closures mean that clients do not have the ability at this time to affirmatively pursue some legal relief, Her Justice continues to provide essential information and advice to our clients through our telephone intake and to prepare them for eventual court openings. Her Justice continues to engage in consumer debt advocacy to enhance the services we offer our clients. For clients who are victims of domestic violence, we provide safety planning around issues stemming from financial abuse. Examples of this include advising clients: how to obtain, review, and request security freezes on credit reports; how to report fraudulent activity to the FTC and other appropriate agencies and to write dispute letters to the reporting agencies, and advocacy letters to creditors; and to change PIN numbers on financial accounts and remove abusers as authorized users. As a complement to our work with individual clients, Her Justice has advocated for protections against enforcement of money judgments and debt collection in this fragile financial time.

**Domestic violence beyond orders of protection.** Beyond consumer issues, domestic violence victims need legal services in other areas of family and matrimonial law. While the courts are closed to some types of matters and new filings, we continue to provide critical information and advice to clients, and prepare their legal cases for the time when the court reopens.

*Child support.* For single mothers living in poverty, child support can be critical. It can mean the difference between providing a stable life for children and resorting to public assistance. Victims of domestic violence may have been estranged from abusive partners in order to remain safe and, therefore, have been shouldering the burden of supporting children. For these women, fair and consistent child support could mean the difference between remaining safe and independent or returning to a dangerous situation. In ordinary times, there are more than 70,000 filings for child support in the New York City Family Courts each year. But during this crisis, court closure means that many families have no access to this needed support. We are urging the Family Courts to consider allowing filing of child support petitions by email, even if the courts cannot adjudicate the matters at this time, so that parents can preserve filing dates to which final support orders or modifications of orders would be retroactive.

*Divorce.* Similarly, divorce can represent particular freedom and security for women who were in abusive marriages. Going through a formal legal process in divorce (rather than just separating) is especially important for women who are typically the lesser-earning spouse; the legal process should ensure a fair child or spousal support award which gives single mothers a critical safety net. Unfortunately, the barriers to and risks from divorce increase exponentially for women who are victims of domestic violence. We know that City Council has been attuned to the particular benefits of a fair divorce process for victims of domestic violence, and the particular challenges as well. At this time, New York Supreme Courts do not have a policy to accept new divorce filings. Nevertheless, our clients continue to need legal assistance around divorce issues. These cases represent two-thirds of our practice, and we continue to meet the need for information and advice about these issues through our legal helpline each week. For the 477 clients we have with ongoing matrimonial cases, Her Justice lawyers and the pro bono attorneys that provide representation continue to stabilize the cases and work with clients to prepare for litigation – including organizing financial documentation related to marital assets and debt – to be ready for the eventual opening of the courts.

*Access to children.* We know that for domestic violence victims with children, co-parenting a child in common with the abuser can be a dangerous time as it allows contact with the abuser. This crisis is posing new challenges for separated parents to arrangements regarding time with children. Yet, at this time, parents cannot rely on the courts to accept new filings relating to custody/visitation as these have not been deemed “essential” cases. One client has recently suffered serious abuse for which the system has failed to adequately respond given the crisis. Just before the courts closed due to the pandemic, our client filed a petition to stop visitation between her child and an abusive ex-partner who had been threatening and harassing her in violation of an order of protection. Because she already had an order of protection, the court did not schedule her visitation petition for an appearance with a judge and she was told she would receive a court date sometime in the future. Mere days after trying to access the courts, her ex-partner appeared, demanding to take the child, and the client was assaulted by her ex-partner in front of their child. The beating was severe and the client needed medical attention, but while the paramedics told her to watch for a concussion, they did not want to admit her to the hospital because of the pandemic. Though the client had been separated from the abuser and in hiding, she believes her ex-partner was tipped off as to her location by a mutual acquaintance who was trying to help the ex-partner enforce his visitation order.

We believe that the cracks in the legal system that are being exposed during this crisis point to opportunities for reform to give more individuals greater access to essential legal services. We know that legal information plays a critical role in empowering survivors to make decisions about when and whether to engage with the legal system, and that organizations like Her Justice will continue to meet this need. We also know that there is an opportunity for the court system to consider how the civil justice system can better respond to individual experience of domestic violence by providing a greater menu of options for dispute resolution that take safety into account. And we know that, given the extreme financial hardship that many people living in poverty are experiencing during this crisis, there is an opportunity to acknowledge that domestic violence compounds other barriers to stability and security for many New Yorkers.

## 2. The experience of immigrant survivors of domestic violence in this public health crisis

Our immigrant clients – all of whom are survivors of gender-based violence – are met with particular challenges during this time. For Her Justice, immigration practice in this crisis when our clients need us most means meeting unrelenting deadlines for documents that are no longer immediately available. Other challenges for our clients are not wholly new, with constantly changing immigration rules and practices and priorities, but are now impacting more deeply vulnerable New Yorkers.

**Barriers to needed legal relief.** In fiscal year 2019, Her Justice provided information, advice and representation to 1,189 women living in poverty in immigration matters under the Violence Against Women Act. We continue to provide information and advice about immigration relief through our legal helpline each week. For the 856 clients we have with ongoing immigration matters, Her Justice lawyers and the pro bono attorneys that provide representation continue to stabilize the cases and work with clients to prepare applications. Yet even in the current public health crisis, when many immigrants are facing great financial harm and working on the frontlines, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services continues to raise barriers to our clients' ability to work legally in this country. USCIS is still requiring people to renew work permits through regular mail using paper forms that need to be signed – and sometimes requiring applicants to submit passport photos; this is difficult if not impossible for many to do without legal counsel or even a computer and printer. Her Justice staff attorneys are working with clients using the technology which is available to them. Sometimes this means exchanging documents through U.S. mail or using photography apps on phones to exchange documents and take photos. Sometimes there is no possible way to provide the documentation that is required by USCIS and attorneys are describing these challenges to USCIS as best they can. And Her Justice continues to advocate for changes to these policies, for example urging USCIS to automatically extend work authorization status until the crisis is over so that survivors' livelihood and eligibility for benefits (including unemployment insurance benefits) are protected at a time they need this most.

Our immigrant clients are in a precarious financial situation and need services and support now more than ever. Our undocumented clients whose immigration applications are pending for years and who do not yet have employment authorization, are ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits. Immigrants who have lost their jobs are reluctant to access benefits and healthcare due to policies like the “public charge” rule change penalizing some immigrants who have used public assistance including Medicaid. While this rule does not apply to our clients, survivors of gender-based violence who obtain status under the Violence Against Women Act, it created a “chilling effect” on public benefits and healthcare utilization. This puts their lives and their families' lives at risk. The unpredictable and threatening climate of the last several years has endangered the immigrant community, making them less likely to seek help. While we reach many immigrants in need, we know that there are many others who are trapped in abusive situations and afraid to reach out for help, or lack the needed technology or literacy skills to do so.

**Unfair immigration enforcement.** During the last several years, we have dedicated significant time and effort to advocating against undue and unfair immigration enforcement actions, including preventing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) from making arrests in the courts, which have had a chilling effect on our clients' willingness to seek help. Even in this time of great crisis, ICE continues its harmful practice of wearing clothing and equipment that bear the word “police” and identifying themselves verbally as police officers while conducting immigration enforcement activities in New York City. As survivors of intimate partner violence, sexual assault or human trafficking, our clients already face many barriers erected by trauma and lack of immigration status. Allowing ICE officers to wear clothing that identifies them as “police” is a tactic meant to deceive immigrants into opening their doors or submitting to questions by ICE officers. Posing as police officers gives ICE officers the ability to confuse people into believing they are investigating a crime, when in fact they are looking to detain and remove someone. Once the trick has worked and ICE enters a home, they often demand identification from everyone present. Many of our clients live in multifamily homes – where they are required to be during this quarantine – and ICE's presence can result in collateral arrests of

other residents determined to be without immigration status. All of these activities have a deleterious mental and emotional, and possibly even physical, effect on our clients.

We commend the Committees on their dedication to addressing the impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on domestic violence in New York City, and we hope that this testimony has served to render more visible the hardships many of our clients face in this challenging time.

Respectfully,

Amy Barasch, Esq.  
Executive Director, Her Justice  
abarasch@herjustice.org



紐約勵馨 **Garden of Hope**

P.O. BOX 520048, FLUSHING, NY 11352, TEL: 718-321-8862 FAX: 718-321-1468  
WWW.GOHNY.ORG

Testimony of Garden of Hope before the NYC Council Committee on Women and Gender Equity and the Committee on Public Safety, regarding the essential services provided by **DOVE Initiative, Human Trafficking Initiative and Sexual Assault Initiative** during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to Fiscal 2020 discretionary contracts, and future Fiscal 2021 discretionary fundings.

Dear Hon. Council members:

Thank you for permitting testimony on this issue. I am Yuanfen Kristen Chi, Executive Director at Garden of Hope. We are a non-profit organization dedicated to serving survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking, especially during this time of uncertainty.

In the face of COVID-19, Garden of Hope still operates on **full capacity** with our staff taking **Language Specific Hotline** from 9 AM-5 PM, Monday to Friday, to provide safety planning, crisis intervention, emotional support, and **transitional housing** for those hard-to-reach Chinese immigrant population. In addition to counseling and advocacy, we provided up to \$1,000 **relief funds** to 65 victims, and **food** supplies to about 150 single mothers with young kids, senior and sick victims over the past six weeks. During this time of social distancing and Stay-at-home order, many people are still exposed to gender-based violence and abuse. Yet, they are less likely to report the crime - They are stuck with the abuser for an extended period of time, and their pain and suffering are silenced even more. The population that we serve has a **low English proficiency** rate. The language barrier not only increases the number of unreachable victims of gender-based violence but also prevents survivors from obtaining government assistance. GOH is committed to staying as capable as we can at this unprecedented time.

During the first and second week of our staff working from home, we had a 30-minute staff check-in meeting on a daily basis to better serve our clients with up-to-date information, since most of them are unable to read in English and they tend to get second-handed, misleading misinformation that is often exaggerated on some Chinese social media. Moreover, all of **our 16 bilingual caseworkers were equipped with a work phone and actively reached out to more than 300 survivors** (continued clients), and they all got their caseworker's phone number in return during the first two weeks. **More than 1750 calls were made in the past six weeks of shelter in place.** Clients are also accustomed to reaching out to caseworkers via **text messages and WeChat**, a social media messaging app that is widely used among the Chinese population. Caseworkers have been receiving around 20-50 text messages from 3-5 clients a day. **We aimed at continuing to offer case management and individual counseling to ease clients' anxiety, fear, feelings of inadequacy, and idleness during this difficult time.**

Starting in April, we started rigorous outreach efforts, including **hosting webinars** on topics such as legislation, immigration, Unemployment Insurance, stimulus bill, mental health, and self-care. We also joined two Chinese-speaking **radio** program shows and did two interviews with a well-known Chinese

**newspaper, World Journal. Through these community actions, we reached at least 30,000 people (based on online click counts) among the new Chinese immigrant population.** Over the past few weeks, our clients have increased by a large margin from services, including hotline, text chat, counseling, webinars, and support groups. **We received many referrals from NYPD, Family Justice Centers, DA offices, National and City DV hotline, ACS, hospitals, legal partners, churches, and old clients. In six weeks, we have opened 43 new cases.**

Meanwhile, many children and teens took to “riding the rails” because they felt like burdens to their families. Therefore, our counselors are committed to helping these youth who have been exposed to domestic violence through a two-and-a-half-hour tutoring session every day (175 person-time) and a one-hour online supporting group (735 person-time). Additionally, we also held ten parenting sessions via Zoom with 135 person-time in hopes of offering single mothers some tips on home-schooling and healthy parent-child communications during this difficult time.

To better serve our clients, we recently implemented **online chat services** on our website (<https://gohny.org>) to survivors. Our counselors will be able to chat with victims of gender-based violence individually, discuss personal crises, explore safety options, provide information, and make referrals. Our vision is a community where survivors are able to access critical local resources at a touch of a button.

**Our clients, who are Chinese immigrants living in poverty, also become victims of racial discrimination due to the fear of this pandemic.** During this time of uncertainty, women who became unemployed are at a higher risk of depression and anxiety. This led to increased tension within the house. Our goal is to continue providing hotline, counseling, advocacy, transitional housing, food supplies so that our clients and their families know: You are not alone.

**Garden of Hope believes that the DOVE Initiative, Sexual Assault Initiative and HT Initiative networks are the backbone of NYC’s justice system** – without language specific and culturally appropriate services given by DOVE, SA and HT service providers, vulnerable families and victims of gender-based violence would not only be left in financial destitution but also trapped in the vicious cycle of abuse – especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you again for giving us this opportunity to talk about our services and the urgent need of our clients. We look forward to working with you to further strengthen the ability of DOVE initiative, SA Initiative and HT initiative service providers to fight against domestic violence, sexual assault and human trafficking.

Sincerely,



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**Girls for Gender Equity Testimony to the New York City Council  
Committee on Women and Gender Equity and Committee on Public Safety  
Oversight – The Impact of COVID-19 on Domestic Violence in New York City  
Delivered by: Quadira Coles  
May 1, 2020**

Good afternoon Chair Rosenthal, Chair Richards, and the members and staff of the Committee on Women and Gender Equity and Committee on Public Safety. My name is Quadira Coles and I am the Policy Manager at Girls for Gender Equity.

GGE is an intergenerational organization based in Brooklyn, New York committed to the all-around development of girls and young women. GGE challenges structural forces, including racism, sexism, gender-based violence, transphobia, homophobia, and economic inequity, which constrict the freedom, full expression, and rights of transgender and cisgender girls and young women of color, and gender non-conforming youth of color. We do this work through direct service, advocacy, and culture change. GGE has been a leader in the conversation around gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and sexual abuse for close to two decades. We are offering testimony today because we want to raise awareness about the ways that gender-based violence has impacted young people of color during COVID-19.

During this pandemic, GGE has continued to center the health and well being of our young people. Our programs team has been conducting ongoing safety assessments, wellness checks, and building safety plans with our young people, especially those young people who have a history of trauma.

Our Sisters in Strength program, which supports survivors of child sexual abuse, sexual violence, and gender-based violence, has built curriculum on processing grief as a survivor, self-care while sheltering-in, safer intimate partner relationships during COVID, and how to stay social while social distancing.

Demands around social distancing and the shift to remote learning introduced new kinds of conflict. In one situation, we learned early on of a series of acts on Facebook and social media in which inappropriate and harmful photos were released to young

people across New York City. Our young people were heavily impacted by this moment. They shared with their facilitators that this disruptive and triggering event had scared them and made them concerned about this new moment where interactions are forced online, and girls' bodies were easily exposed. GGE staff immediately responded. We held space holding restorative circles and offering tools for young people to engage in self-care and address concerns. Additionally, our team shifted the curriculum and built a module to educate participants about cyber safety and how gender-based violence appears in the digital realm. We continue to offer support about how to navigate boundaries in online spaces. GGE filled critical gaps in services in this case while the young peoples' schools were ill-prepared or unequipped to respond in a trauma-informed, healing-centered way.

Since March 22nd our programs have adjusted to convene, educate, support, and organize young people virtually. We offer counseling services for all young people by staff social workers. In these one-to-one sessions, staff are addressing the impact of grief and isolation on sleep and our emotional states. We have linked young people to meditation and wellness apps, and teletherapy supports and 24-hour hotlines. Additionally, our social workers have provided consultation on how to navigate parental and sibling relationships especially when there is a history of conflict, including a history of emotional abuse, unacceptance of a young person's gender expression or sexuality, enforcement of unfair gender roles with the family system (i.e. girls are expected to be household caregivers instead of completing their school work).

GGE's services have always been essential for New York City's most vulnerable youth, and now COVID-19 is exposing what our young people have always known, GGE fills the critical service gaps that the most vulnerable youth experience due to systematic failure. We must ensure that the Young Women's Initiative and other City Council efforts which meet the needs of youth survivors are preserved and protected, they remain essential during these difficult times.

- The Voices of Women (VOW) respectfully submits written testimony on the impact of COVID-19 on Domestic Violence in New York City.
- VOW is made-up of community-organizers who are survivors of domestic violence. We work to reform and revolutionize domestic policy, its implementation, and the services survivors turn-to for safety, justice and assistance.
- We continue with our mission to organize intensely to protect survivors and their children during these unprecedented times.
- For survivors of domestic violence and their children, COVID-19 has not only rattled their existing methods of surviving an abusive relationship, it has destroyed them in many ways.
- The government's current domestic violence response systems in place to support survivors are not enough, and they have not fully evolved to meet survivors' needs.
- It was very concerning at the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak for survivors to call a Family Justice Center and have to leave a voicemail message.
- We are baffled as to why there was not a Continuity of Operations Plan ready to implement as needed. What if the emergency was not COVID-19? What if it was weather bad enough to shut down the Family Justice Center? The response so far does not measure up to the responsibility the City assumed.

- We still don't know what supports the City has available for victims that used their work, errands, and general outside time as a refuge from their abusers? As you know, social distancing is a form of isolation, and isolation is a primary tactic of abusers.
- Survivors are trapped with their abusers and nowhere else to go. Imagine having to live like this, and now think about it as a parent attempting to homeschool your child. We have deepening concerns about ACS interaction with survivors, where the entry point is educational neglect.
- City agencies, particularly ACS and DOE, are using the same guidelines as they did pre-COVID-19. The systems must increase their understanding of domestic violence or they will re-victimize survivors.
- We recognize that calls to the domestic violence hotlines may go up and down. What you are seeing is the nature of a domestic violence relationship in realtime.
- When calls are down, it does not mean that violence in some form is not present. It means that the domestic violence response systems don't know what's happening.
- And a drop in calls could actually indicate a rise in incidents of domestic violence in conjunction with a seriously concerning inability, on the part of the survivor, to reach out for help due to the 'Stay at Home' order.

Voices of Women's Written Testimony

May 1, 2020 Hearing

Impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on Domestic Violence in New York City, legislation is T2020-6105

Held jointly with the Committees on Women and Gender Equity and the Committee on Public Safety

- We recommend that the City's DV response systems become readily available to chat, text, and to develop other touchpoints for a survivor to reach out for help. If they do not, survivors will remain in grave danger.
  
- Thank you.



## CITY COUNCIL TESTIMONY

Urban Resource Insitute

Nathaniel Field, President & CEO

May 1, 2020

Good afternoon Council Member Rosenthal and members of the Committee. My name is Nathaniel Fields and I have the pleasure of serving as President and CEO of Urban Resource Institute (URI) and as Chair of the New York State Coalition on Domestic Violence. I am thankful for the opportunity to come before you and share important lessons and takeaways from our front-line work at Urban Resource Institute during the COVID-19 outbreak.

### About URI

This year URI marks 40 years of serving vulnerable populations and an unwavering dedication to survivors of domestic and gender-based violence. In New York City alone, we offer close to 1,200 beds to victims of violence on any given evening, making us the largest provider of domestic violence shelter in the country with plans to further increase capacity in the near future. Aligned with our approach to deliver innovative client-centered and trauma-informed services to victims of domestic and gender-based violence, we are proud to also offer shelters for homeless families, supportive facilities and job placement for adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities. URI is organized to end domestic and gender-based violence and to this end offers additional services such as economic empowerment programs for survivors and a full suite of dating violence prevention and community education programs in intermediate and high schools reaching 40,000 young people each year, as well as an accountability program for perpetrators of abuse in Manhattan and in Westchester counties.

### “The Other Epidemic”

In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned that domestic and gender-based violence would likely increase as distancing measures were put in place and people were encouraged to stay home. With domestic violence labeled [“the other epidemic”](#) of the COVID-19 outbreak, and in line with reports suggesting that cases of domestic and gender-based violence have increased exponentially across the globe, directives aimed to promote sheltering-in-place and social distancing have uniquely impacted victims seeking safety. In our experience, we found that victims have been cut-off from support systems and are privy to an increased burden of household work, a disruption of their livelihoods, restricted access to healthcare, legal aid, and protection, and restricted freedom. While the data is limited and varied, early reports reveal that victims may be hesitant to report crimes due to fear or an inability to socially distance from their abusive partners. On April 24, 2020, Governor Cuomo confirmed New York State’s [dangerous uptick in domestic violence](#) incidents and introduced a new text program to aid victims of abuse and provide potentially lifesaving ways to get help.



## **Our Response to COVID-19**

As New York began to shelter-in-place, URI teams partnered with city and state representatives including but not limited to the department of health to understand the virus, and the necessary implications for the populations we service as well as our staff. This resulted in engagement in a proactive review of existing protocols, and the determination of the need for and development of new policies, protocols, and resources to ensure that programs and services would continue to operate in the safest possible manner. URI department heads in conjunction with program staff specifically worked to implement enhanced safety protocols for staff and clients and ways of assessing and addressing client medical needs, developing systems of health tracking and processes for daily check-in. We stocked food pantries, collected and distributed PPE, and quickly worked to create pay incentives for on-site staff while standardizing our services to build structure and normalcy. To address our entire constituency we quickly shared our message through website updates, emails, the media, and other communications, offering safety planning tips and reinforcing that city shelters remain open and ready to serve victims.

## **Shifting the Narrative**

URI's media interviews since COVID-19 [questioned precepts](#) that a universal "safest option" was home and sought to shift the narrative to include victims of domestic and gender-based violence. In speaking out and breaking the silence for all populations experiencing abuse—including LGBTQ individuals—we wanted victims to know they were not alone, that we understood the stressors that arise when a victim is forced to live in close proximity with their abuser, and that as family members spend more time in close contact with potential economic or job loss at play, that situations can become increasingly volatile and dangerous. Most importantly, we wanted New Yorkers to know that escape was possible, that we could assist with safety planning, and that support was available to all residents. As the crisis continues to unfold, we have been proud to assist victims as they escape lockdown and rebuild their livelihoods away from their abusers.

## **URI's Approach to Serving Clients During COVID-19**

While URI's staff and clients are no strangers to crisis, our work reconfirms the physical, emotional, and financial effects of abusive relationships and their lingering damage. Using a trauma-informed approach, we identified and implemented procedures across each shelter and within our non-residential programs to ensure consistency of services, including crisis intervention, case management, counseling, and educational support. Currently we offer the following:

1. Case management and counseling services through video conferencing platforms like Microsoft Teams, FaceTime, Zoom, and WhatsApp, and cell phones
2. Interactive support groups, parenting classes, and recreation opportunities via Zoom
3. Close work with Department of Education and our Information Technology department to obtain iPads for school-aged children, including the setup of enterprise-wide wifi access
4. Provision of iPads to children in shelter, ensuring a return to school virtual learning
5. Support for parents on navigating remote learning, providing homework help to children, and developing other educational and recreational activities for children
6. Engaging clients involved in Working Internship Network Program in ongoing conversations about economic empowerment via interactive and creative workshops



With victims already in crisis, creating a sense of normalcy and options to access resources is critical. Moving past previous systems challenges, we are proud to have completed the installation of wifi and new televisions at all of our shelters to incentivized our 2000+ residential clients to shelter-in-place and help stop the spread of COVID-19 in New York City.

### **URI's Approach to Supporting Front-line Staff**

Knowing our front-line staff would need additional support during this crisis, we were proud to develop and implement plans to keep our shelters and sites staffed and holistically supported. We did so by accomplishing the following:

1. Pay incentives and purchased significant supplies such as personal protective equipment to demonstrate appreciation and keep staff motivated to work safely and productively.
2. Staff training on how to work effectively with clients through teleconferencing and phone sessions to best support clients
3. Newly developed curriculum from our Quality Improvement and Evaluation team about stress management, working from home, emotional resiliency, and more.
4. Creation of organizational intranet to support sharing information and updates with all staff and to acknowledge staff efforts
5. Development of URI CARES (Celebrating and Recognizing Employee Service) cross-functional initiative to highlight front-line heroes working on the ground

### **Our Path Forward**

URI is extremely grateful for current discretionary funding through the Dove Initiative, which supports our economic empowerment program, and whose continuance will be even more important for victims struggling with limited incomes, and possible job losses as a result of the crisis. As always we thank the Council for their dedication to URI's programs.

Above and beyond the continuation of DOVE funding, we would like to request and highlight our new ask for this year for our Abusive Partner Intervention Program (APIP), which furthers our work to stop the cycle of domestic and gender-based violence. In working with perpetrators of abuse, we can enhance our efforts to curb domestic and gender-based violence which is expected to rise even further in the coming year.

As conversations about trauma and impact of domestic and gender-based violence begin to get more media attention, we want to be mindful about the cycle of abuse so we can get ahead of what could be a tidal wave of new victims and perpetrators. Therefore we plan to increase domestic violence Tier II shelter capacity with the opening of two new shelters in the first quarter of the new fiscal year with support of New York City's Human Resources Administration and the New York State OTDA in order to have sufficient capacity for victims who are ready and in need of shelter. In addition, URI hopes to stabilize existing shelter spaces by obtaining capital support from the City Counsel to purchase PALS Place, an innovative emergency domestic violence shelter that provides trauma informed services to hundreds of victims and their pets.



Once again thank you for the opportunity to come before you today and talk about the work of Urban Resource Institute. Our shelters continue to provide compassionate Tier I emergency and

Tier II longer-term housing to victims of domestic and gender-based violence, but we know a comprehensive, 360-degree approach to reducing abuse in New York City will have long-term effects on the safety and well-being on of the city during the pandemic. While keeping victim safety and accountability at the core of all that we do, we are hopeful that evaluation of this innovative model will result in positive outcomes that will also inform the field.



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**Testimony of Arab-American Family Support Center Before the New York City Council  
Committee on Health  
Friday May 1, 2020**

I want to begin by thanking the Committee on Women and Gender Equity, the Committee on Public Safety, and the entire New York City Council for inviting community-based organizations to comment on the impact of COVID-19 on Domestic Violence in New York City. My name is Kerry Sesil, Director of Development and Communications at the Arab-American Family Support Center (AAFSC). I am honored to testify today on behalf of immigrant and refugee families throughout New York City.

At the Arab-American Family Support Center (AAFSC), we have strengthened immigrant and refugee families since 1994. We promote well-being, prevent violence, prepare families to learn, work, and succeed, and amplify the voices of marginalized populations. Our organization serves all who are in need, but over nearly 25 years of experience, we have gained cultural and linguistic competency serving New York's growing Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian communities.

AAFSC provides comprehensive case management, crisis intervention, safety planning, and mental health support for survivors of all forms of gender-based violence. Our staff is culturally and linguistically competent and trauma-informed. Collectively, we speak 22 languages including Arabic, Bangla, Hindi, Nepali, Urdu, Pashto, and Punjabi and over 30 dialects, enabling us to communicate with ease, nuance, and cultural sensitivity. Typically, we provide services out of all five Family Justice Centers and reach over 1,375 survivors with intensive services annually.

These past few weeks have been tremendously challenging for all. Vulnerable communities, like the immigrant and refugees we serve, are facing acute difficulties because of housing, food, and economic instability. For survivors of gender-based violence and families impacted by child abuse and neglect, social distancing and directives to remain home can be frightening and dangerous. We know that the rates of domestic and gender-based violence will only increase as people are forced into shared spaces for extended periods of time and the stressors of the economy and soaring rates of unemployment weigh heavily on individuals.

Given that the NYC Family Justice Centers had to close their doors in line with the city's social distancing directives, we have pivoted our service delivery approach and invested in a confidential, HIPAA compliant teleconferencing platform. Our team continues to connect with existing clients and to receive new referrals - **in the month of April, we supported 178 clients with extensive, ongoing gender-based violence survivor support. While there are challenges to conducting this essential work remotely, we are doing everything in our power - including expending unplanned resources on appropriate, confidential technology, staff training, and additional outreach- to make sure that we are supporting the most at-risk individuals throughout New York City.** In addition to individual counseling, AAFSC is offering digital support groups. We have extended our 6-week trial sessions for 16 people as they have been quite successful in building community, trust, and support during these

challenging times. AAFSC is proud to be a trusted resource that people turn to in their times of need. We are receiving referrals through the FJCs, our partners at NYLAG, local precincts, faith-based leaders, and from within our other programs.

AAFSC's Anti-Violence team is seeing and meeting new challenges. We have witnessed an increase in the number of clients who request that we call at specific times. Many clients prefer to text or email as it is more discreet, so our new technology has been critical. We are launching a hotline, which has no DV identifying information, with extended hours to ensure that our community members can have help directly when they need it. We are ever mindful that clients may be in the same room with their abuser. As such, we are supporting our staff on building approaches, like encouraging clients to use code words with Case Managers if they are at risk or establishing safety plans with their neighbors, to skillfully address this barrier. We are seeing increased homicidal and suicidal risk amongst our clients. As such, AAFSC connected our Anti-Violence team with additional trainings to manage this heightened risk and we continue to re-train staff on Mental Health First Aid.

Unemployment coupled with increased costs of remaining healthy are creating unbearably stressful situations for our clients. Many survivors have told us that they need to get out of their unsafe living situations but they cannot afford a two-month deposit for a new apartment. Clients who filed taxes jointly with a partner last year have continuously expressed anxiety about who will get the stimulus checks. Because of the additional need for financial assistance, we've doubled our efforts related to fundraising. We expanded our Emergency Fund, which provides immediate financial assistance to individuals facing a crisis. Through the fund, we provide resources to at-risk individuals so they can pay for food, cleaning supplies, medical bills, and overcome a financial barrier that impedes their safety. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis in New York, we have provided financial assistance to 45 survivors of domestic violence.

We are also facing challenges in getting clients' locks changed as many locksmiths are closed or have reduced hours. Further, some custodial parents are requesting a temporary suspension on their visits due to COVID-19 and this has created stressful and violent encounters.

The need for culturally and linguistically competent, trauma-informed services for survivors of gender-based violence remains great as we continue to provide services digitally. The need will only increase in the coming days as the city relaxes social distancing directives and people once again return to the Family Justice Centers looking for support. We are deeply committed to remaining a resource for those individuals, but we cannot do it without the city's ongoing support. The Arab-American Family Support Center respectfully requests the city's continued commitment through the DOVE initiative to ensure that agencies are equipped with the resources to continue providing services, albeit in a slightly altered way, and to maintain the staff required for when the 'floodgates' are opened in the coming weeks and months and in-person service delivery returns as the norm. If we are forced to make staff cuts, we will not be equipped to provide the necessary services when the city's doors open again.

Thank you for your attention. As always, the Arab-American Family Support Center stands ready to work with you in ensuring the most vulnerable among us thrive.



**Testimony submitted by Turning Point for Women and Families to the Committee on Public Safety Hearing on the “The Impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on Domestic Violence in New York City”**

May 1, 2020

My name is Robina Niaz, MS, MSW and I am the Executive Director of Turning Point for Women and Families (“Turning Point”). I founded Turning Point in 2004 as the first nonprofit to address domestic violence within New York City’s Muslim communities. Turning Point helps Muslim women and girls affected by domestic violence empower themselves and transform their lives through culturally competent services focused on safety and self-sufficiency. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony about the Impact of COVID-19 on Domestic Violence within New York City’s Muslim communities.

COVID-19 has had a harmful impact on the lives of the women with whom we work by amplifying the challenges they faced prior to the pandemic. Many of Turning Point’s clients are South Asian immigrant women. Under normal circumstances, these women face multiple obstacles when seeking domestic violence services, including linguistic barriers as well as the absence of culturally competent domestic violence services in the neighborhoods in which they live. Their situation is compounded by poverty; absence of close relatives or support networks; denial or misunderstanding about the causes, prevalence, dynamics, and issues of domestic violence; as well as a lack of knowledge about victims’ rights and legal protection available to them.

Now, as New York collectively works to prevent the spread of COVID-19 through the “New York State on PAUSE” order, women and young children are stuck at home with their

abuser. Social isolation becomes a powerful tool in the hands of abusers who exploit this situation to further control women. And, when the abuser and the victim are both out of work and confined to the home all day (often in very small apartments), there is little opportunity for a woman to call us without being discovered by the abuser. So, we are receiving very few calls from survivors who live with their abusers. This is very troubling to us because they are even more isolated now and may be in physical danger.

By contrast, in the case of survivors who no longer live with their abusers, we are experiencing a 33% increase in calls to our help line. Many of these women were just getting back on their feet, when the pandemic struck. They had secured housing and found work (often in daycare, retail, and other sectors that are now closed). Now, out of work, they find themselves facing great uncertainty about paying for their rent, utilities, groceries etc. and generally moving forward. The pandemic has disrupted their momentum and threatens both their short-term and long-term stability. Some of them are looking to us for financial assistance to help them (and often their children) buy groceries, pay utilities, and meet other basic needs. We are fortunate to have the resources to offer these women small monetary grants.

In general, we continue to provide services remotely as best as we can, given the complex nature of our work and the risks to physical safety faced by some of our clients. While everyone looks forward to a return to “normal,” we know from experience that there will be another layer of trauma challenging the ability of victims/survivors of domestic violence to regain a sense of normalcy in their lives. And, we will need even more resources to address the issues that will surface.

For these reasons, I wish to express how critical it is that New York City continue to honor its FY 2020 expense funding designations; and, wherever possible, increase FY 2021 funding to

ensure the safety and overall well-being of the city's most vulnerable communities. I cannot overemphasize the importance of City Council funding for a small, community-based organization such as Turning Point. Thanks in large part to the Council's funding over the past three years, we have been able to expand our programs, hire more staff, move into a larger office space and serve more women and girls. Continued and increased funding will allow us to maintain this momentum as New York City emerges from this devastating pandemic.

Thank You.

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**Testimony submitted to the New York City Council  
Committee on Women and Gender Equity**

**Friday, May 1, 2020 1:00 p.m.  
Remote Hearing  
Jointly with the Committee on Public Safety**

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

Good afternoon. My name is Brian Dworkin and I am accompanied on this call by Jae Young Kim. I supervise the domestic violence and family law practice in the Queens office of Legal Services NYC (“LSNYC”) and Jae Young supervises the family and immigration law unit in our Bronx office. Thank you for this opportunity to testify about the impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on Domestic Violence in New York City.

We want to express our appreciation to the City Council for its continued support for the work of combating domestic violence, and its support to survivors through funding for the DoVE program. That funding supports 12 advocates throughout our program, in whole or in part, who provide direct client services.

The public health emergency is directly and disproportionately impacting communities of color and, not coincidentally, our clients are primarily immigrant survivors of color. Support for our program and all of the DoVE programs directly affirms the City’s commitment to improving lives in these communities.

LSNYC is the largest organization devoted to providing free civil legal services in the United States, with neighborhood offices in every borough of New York City. LSNYC fights poverty and seeks racial, social and economic justice for low-income New Yorkers. We are a recognized legal and core services provider to low income families, families and individuals experiencing violence and we serve survivors regardless of status. Our borough offices are participating agencies at all of the New York City Family Justice Centers, the operations of which are considered essential services on par with the Police and Fire Departments.

In the best of times, domestic violence is a pernicious social condition; currently, we know survivors are trapped living with their abusers and obtaining relief and safety is even more difficult. From the weeks of March 18 to April 5, the New York City Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence ("ENDGBV") reported that website visits to their New York City domestic violence resource page had more than doubled from 45 to 115 visits a day.<sup>1</sup> On several occasions, the Notify NYC COVID-19 Text Alert System has sent text messages telling domestic violence survivors they are not alone and they can seek help on the NYC Hope website, which direct survivors to the Family Justice Centers and the NYC DV Hotline.

During this COVID-19 public health emergency, LSNYC continues to provide comprehensive legal and social support services to individuals affected by domestic violence. Although our physical offices are closed as of March 17, 2020, our dedicated staff are working remotely on behalf of new and existing clients. Our IT department has

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/07/us/nyc-domestic-violence-website-surgin/index.html>

equipped every staff member to work remotely and ensure full use of our email system, intranet, electronic files and phone system while working remotely.

Our advocates provide legal assistance and representation to clients in the virtual NYC Courts, including obtaining new Orders of Protection and drafting emergency motions related to custody and visitation. We continue to provide advice to clients concerning custody and parenting issues that have arisen as a result of the public health emergency. Our advocates also continue to provide immigration assistance to survivors of domestic violence and trafficking. LSNYC also continues to engage in interdisciplinary client assessment and advocacy, and makes in house referrals to housing, public benefits, education and other essential legal needs that arise for clients during this critical time. DOVE funds support all of this work.

### **LSNYC'S TRANSITION TO PRACTICING IN NEW YORK VIRTUAL COURTS**

LSNYC has successfully worked with State Courts as they transitioned to virtual appearances for essential emergency matters. Advocates have been regularly facilitating virtual communication with the Courts and filing emergency petitions on behalf of new and existing clients. LSNYC attorneys petitioned the virtual family court for an order of protection on behalf of a client the very first day the court was in operation, and we have worked with the court system to both publicize its operation and troubleshoot glitches that arise. The unprecedented stress of the pandemic has escalated tension and violence due to limitations on survivors' usual coping tactics and safety measures, thereby increasing risk of harm within homes that had already experienced domestic violence. To meet this

critical need, we continue to accept referrals and conduct intake telephonically, including referrals from the New York City Family Justice Centers. Our advocates provide free and confidential legal assistance and ensure that all of our clients are aware of the constant changes within the civil and immigration legal systems and all potential relief available to them.

### **LSNYC'S CONTINUED COMMITMENT TO IMMIGRATION LEGAL**

#### **SERVICES**

Undocumented survivors of domestic violence are particularly vulnerable as they are unable to receive the Federal stimulus relief and are not eligible for most forms of public assistance. Having a pending application however may allow them to access Medicaid and some forms of public assistance as well as possible eligibility for work authorization. We have clients who remain with their abusers due to financial constraints and we know that seeking immigration relief is an important part of supporting them. We are also bearing significant administrative burdens in obtaining necessary documents as governments and businesses are closed both in the United States and abroad, and our clients need additional support in obtaining documents that were simple to obtain prior to COVID-19.

### **LSNYC'S SOCIAL WORKERS'S RAPID COVID-19 RESPONSE**

Our social workers are also providing assistance and support to our clients and compiling community resources for our clients, as we are concerned about clients' ability to access food and shelter with the current crisis. The COVID-19: LSNYC Social Workers

Resources and Responses Google Document is available to the public.<sup>2</sup> Our social workers have also shifted resources to prioritize crisis counselling for our most marginalized clients, such as survivors of domestic violence. We are prioritizing survivors of domestic violence who may be in an even more precarious situation due to the pause order that may require them to shelter in place with their abuser. Our office has also created a client fund for clients impacted by COVID-19, prioritizing vulnerable individuals such as survivors of domestic violence.

### **LSNYC'S COVID-19 RESPONSE AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH EDUCATION**

We have updated our website to provide up-to-date COVID-19 related information in multiple languages for our clients and the NYC communities we serve.<sup>3</sup> We are also speaking with local elected officials and our community partners to create virtual know your rights trainings and community forums and hope to schedule them soon. For instance, we have continued to meet with our Upper Manhattan Domestic Violence Services Collaborative to maintain a continuity of services among our partner organizations that each serve survivors and their families from a different vantage point. This week alone, our Manhattan office provided a training to Settlement House to train their staff charged with checking in on their clients to screen for domestic violence and dating violence.

We continue to participate in local and citywide DV Committee and DV Task Force meetings by telephone or video. We also provide guidance to advocates at other DV agencies

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<sup>2</sup> <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1UURc2nGBn5xaDVs-bwtcl4nu54Gu-InZjkBArLe2wqA/edit#heading=h.5x0d5h95i329>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.legalservicesnyc.org/what-we-do/covid-resources>

about the virtual court, filing petitions, and making referrals for legal services. Our Staten Island office has noticed an increase in technological abuse in this era, and have strengthened our partnership with Cornell Tech through the Family Justice Center to better support our clients in recognizing and combatting tech abuse when it occurs. LSNYC staff are readily available to answer questions and support survivors. For instance, our Brooklyn office opened up a hotline to provide advice to individuals who have concerns regarding custody, visitation, and orders of protection during this pandemic. Attorneys have been monitoring calls closely and providing a rapid response to ensure that victims who need help get it as quickly as possible. We have experienced attorneys who are keeping safety planning in the forefront of their minds while advising hotline callers on their legal rights and current court procedures.

In order to keep survivors safe, financial independence is also a paramount concern. Our efforts to retain financial independence for our clients includes: assisting existing clients apply for emergency COVID-19 funds established by LSNYC social workers which provides money for basic necessities like food, medicine, phone bill, personal hygiene products, diapers, and cleaning supplies; working closely with other units in all of our office in a citywide coordinated effort to assist clients apply for benefits, including unemployment benefits and safety net assistance programs including food stamps, cash, and health insurance; advising clients on rental issues arising from their inability to pay rent due to their recent loss of employment; providing clients who are small business owners with resources and assistance on how to apply for federal financial relief through the CARES Act.

Through news outlets and social media, we are increasing awareness of how domestic violence survivors and low-income communities of color and immigrants are extremely vulnerable during this pandemic.<sup>4</sup> In addition, we are currently planning outreach and training efforts aimed at serving some of the most marginalized DV survivors such as LGBT survivors, and Deaf/Hard of Hearing. One of our attorneys testified before the NYC City Council Committees on Public Safety, Technology, and Fire and Emergency Management back in November 2019 regarding the increased risk to Deaf/Hard of Hearing DV survivors who struggle to reach emergency police or medical services without an option to text to 9-1-1, a service that has become even more critical with survivors isolated in their homes. LSNYC also helps homeless DV/IPV survivors access and keep shelter placements and we lead a coalition with ENDGBV to address access to benefits for GBV survivors.

### **LSYNC CLIENT STORIES DURING COVID-19**

The services that we provide to survivors are not merely theoretical or prospective. Our attorneys, social workers, paralegals and other staff are working on the front lines to help survivors and their families find safety and stability during these unprecedented, challenging times. Survivors are grateful for the assistance we are providing during this crisis. What follows are but a few of the many examples of the work we have done in each of the five boroughs with and for clients since the PAUSE went into effect.

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<sup>4</sup> *Black, Latino and Native Survivors of Domestic Violence Survivors Face “Chaos” During the Pandemic.* <https://www.ourprism.org/1934978> and <https://madamenoire.com/1145764/the-storm-within-the-storm-how-domestic-violence-victims-can-survive-covid-19/>

### **Bronx**

We are currently preparing emergency papers on behalf of a survivor of domestic violence whose abusive partner assaulted her during a visitation exchange in front of their child and then proceeded to keep the child in his home in violation of the parties' custody and visitation order. The abusive partner, without any basis, used the PAUSE Executive Order to violate a court order and deprive our client of access to her child. Our advocate is working with the client to file an Order of Protection and an Emergency Motion to ensure that the child is returned and the schedule is followed during the COVID pandemic.

We are currently assisting a survivor of domestic violence seeking to file a VAWA self-petition and U visa. She had been with her husband for approximately 20 years before she decided to leave him recently. The husband's ex-girlfriend also harassed our client and claimed to have written to immigration and threatened to have the client deported. Our client was speaking with our office shortly before our offices closed due to the COVID pandemic seeking immigration assistance. We have prioritized her case as she has a U visa cert and a prior removal order, both factors that make this matter time sensitive, as U visa certification is only good for 6 months, and a prior removal order makes her vulnerable to ICE and being deported yet again. She is struggling to build a new life without her abuser and our services are essential if she wishes to obtain lawful immigration status.

### **Brooklyn**

We represent a client from Mexico with two U.S. citizen children. We represented her in a contested divorce and are currently representing her in a pending U non-immigrant visa application. After the husband's arrest and conviction for acts of DV and other

crimes, he was deported to Mexico. Client became the sole wage earner making a living cleaning homes to support her young children. She lost her job as a result of COVID-19. We referred her to community resources for food, the government benefits unit to apply for all the safety net assistance the family is entitled to receive and applied for a LSNYC's emergency client COVID-19 fund, which awarded the client \$700 for basic necessities.

We provided advice, counsel and referral to a domestic violence survivor who lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania who called the office's domestic violence hotline seeking assistance. She is the mother of a disabled thirteen-year-old child. The child is a cancer survivor in a wheelchair, who was visiting his father in Brooklyn last month. The father told the mother that he was not going to return the child to her claiming concerns over COVID-19. While in the care of his father, the child has not been engaging in remote learning and has gone without the services of his home health aide. When the mother came to Brooklyn to pick up her son, the father became verbally abusive in the presence of the child and refused to let the child go with his mother. The police intervened but directed the mother to family court because there are no existing custody or visitation order. The client desperately called numerous organizations and attempted to file a custody case in Family Court in Philadelphia with no success. Our office provided her with advice and counsel, safety planning, and referred her to a sister legal services organization in Pennsylvania that will assist her and file an emergency order to show cause for custody.

We represent a 24-year-old survivor of sexual assault and domestic violence in a VAWA Self-Petition and an adjustment of status application. Her family is back home in Italy and she is here without any support system or family. She lost her job as a result of

COVID-19. We referred her to community resources for food, assisted her to apply for safety net assistance she is entitled to receive, and referred her to our housing unit for advice after her landlord demanded in writing that tenants use their stimulus check to pay the rent. We applied for a LSNYC's emergency client COVID-19 fund which awarded the her \$350 for basic necessities.

### *Manhattan*

We assisted a survivor of domestic violence in filing a police report for a violation of her order of protection that "expired" after the physical courts closed. Last weekend, the abuser texted her and threatened to come to her home. She took her three young children to a safe location and while they were gone, he broke her locks and her door, entered her apartment and stole thousands of dollars' worth of electronics and personal possessions. When she contacted the police, they asked to see her order of protection. The last one that she received expired in April and the police doubted that a violation had in fact occurred. She contacted her attorney at our office and we provided her with the administrative court order that said that all temporary orders of protection were extended. The police were still not convinced and we had to advocate with the police on a Saturday evening to insist they file a police report for the incident and with her management company to provide her with a new lock. We are currently assisting this client obtain funding to obtain a new door and an additional lock.

We are also assisting clients in negotiating modifications to existing orders of visitation in order to minimize health risks to children who would normally travel on a weekly basis between the parents' homes. This is one of the most pressing issue for many

of our clients, as many children suffer from asthma and other health conditions and live in multi-generational households where at risk grandparents are present.

### *Queens*

One of our clients, L, is originally from the Dominican Republic. She married a US citizen corrections officer and moved to the United States. The parties had a child but L's husband was abusive to her and after she discovered he possessed a large cache of drugs, he had her arrested and filed for divorce. The divorce is pending for about four years with ongoing proceedings for custody of the parties' child, who is now 5 years old. Since the shelter at home directive went into effect, L's husband violated the order of parenting time and withheld the child from L. One of our attorneys filed another contempt motion and at conference, the Court directed the husband to comply with the parenting time order and threatened to change custody. Unfortunately, L contracted COVID-19 virus and is now in quarantine.

In another matter, the former boyfriend of client S filed a family offense case against S, alleging she committed fraud against him and was a terrorist and was threatening to harm him. This petition was filed in retaliation for S having the ex-boyfriend arrested after he assaulted her, resulting in the issuance of a criminal court order of protection against the ex-boyfriend. Following several months of proceedings, the ex-boyfriend's Family Court family offense petition against S was dismissed.

### *Staten Island*

We helped a survivor obtain an order of protection on the first day of the NYC Virtual Family Court. Throughout the course of her relationship, our client was subjected

to severe and repeated acts of violence by her husband. He had punched her, kicked her, beat her with a stick, and threatened to kill her. Our client, an essential public health worker who regularly worked night shifts, was especially vulnerable and fearful because her abuser had begun to stalk and harass her at her workplace. With our assistance we were able to obtain a temporary order of protection on behalf of this client.

We are also assisting domestic violence survivors from the LGBT+ community receive unbiased and culturally competent assistance. We are assisting an LGBT teacher to obtain an order of protection from the virtual court after he was violently raped by his ex-boyfriend and subjected to online abuse and humiliation, and we are ensuring that a non-biological mother is able to maintain a relationship with her daughter despite her abusive wife's attempts to undermine the legitimacy of her parental relationship.

We have also provided legal services, supportive counseling and safety planning to survivors currently living with their abusers and identified to us by attorneys in other practice areas. For instance, a social worker provided supportive counseling and safety planning for one survivor who called an attorney at 7:30 in the morning because she was distressed and afraid for her safety. We are also assisting a monolingual Spanish speaking survivor who reached out to her attorney for help on a Sunday afternoon by sending a text message immediately after an incident of domestic violence.

We are grateful for this opportunity to share all the hard work our colleagues have done during this frightening and stressful COVID pandemic. We are also thankful that we have the opportunity to share the stories of these survivors of domestic violence. COVID-19 has made our clients more vulnerable and denying funding would mean losing staff

who are doing crucial frontline work to advocate for the safety of survivors of domestic violence throughout New York City. Our DoVE funding is essential to continue our work and shift our resources to meet the growing vulnerability of survivors of domestic violence in new and innovative ways.

Thank you.

Brian Dworkin  
Director, Family Law Unit  
Queens Legal Services  
Legal Services NYC

Jae Young Kim  
Director, Family and Immigration Unit  
Bronx Legal Services  
Legal Services NYC

**Testimony by the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)  
Before the NYC Committee on Public Safety and  
Committee on Women and Gender Equity  
May 1, 2020**

Chair Richards, Chair Rosenthal, Council Members, and staff, good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Committee on Public Safety and the Committee on Women and Gender Equity about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on domestic violence in New York City. My name is Tuozhi Lorna Zhen and I am a Supervising Attorney at the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)'s Domestic Violence Law Unit. NYLAG uses the power of the law to help New Yorkers in need combat social and economic injustice. We address emerging and urgent legal needs with comprehensive, free civil legal services, impact litigation, policy advocacy, and community education. Our Domestic Violence Law Unit (DVLU) provides free representation to domestic violence survivors in the five boroughs, as well as continued survivor's advocacy and safety planning. DVLU attorneys have expertise in family offense petitions, custody and visitation matters, child and spousal support matters, contested and uncontested divorces, family law appeals, and domestic violence based immigration claims.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify before the Committee on Public Safety and the Committee on Women and Gender Equity today, as well as support that the City Council and the Mayor's Administration have shown for low-income New Yorkers, especially during this difficult time. With new and increasing challenges faced by domestic violence survivors during the COVID-19 pandemic, the support of the City Council and the Mayor's Administration is critical.

## Special Challenges Presented by COVID-19

On March 20, 2020, after NYC public schools were closed for the indefinite future, Governor Andrew Cuomo enacted a sweeping “PAUSE” order, closing all non-essential businesses and ordering families to stay home and social distance whenever possible. Shortly afterwards, the Office of Court Administrations closed all court buildings in the State of New York. These orders were essential to the continued public safety of all New Yorkers in light of the rapid spread of COVID-19 and the strain it would place on our city’s health care system, but there were unfortunate consequences for domestic violence survivors.

In early April, the World Health Organization cited their concern of intimate partner violence increasing during the global COVID-19 pandemic, as statistics have historically shown that violence against women tends to increase during every type of emergency, including health epidemics.<sup>1</sup> While data is scarce, news reports from China, Italy, France, the United Kingdom, and Spain suggest an increase in domestic violence cases since the COVID-19 outbreak began. These reports are especially concerning given parallel accounts from U.S. cities citing declining calls and crime reports related to domestic violence. These reports are reflective of NYLAG’s own data – where we once saw over 100 calls per week to the DVLU’s intake line, now we see between 10-15 calls per week.

None of this should be surprising. As we have seen with previous disasters that left people confined to their homes, such as Superstorm Sandy, extended time at home breeds tension, limits the ability to distance oneself, and often escalates incidents of abuse. This is multiplied when schools are closed and children must also stay at home, and when family members lose jobs, creating further stress. Small arguments can quickly escalate; without viable options for escape,

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. “COVID-19 and violence against women: What the health sector/system can do.” 7 April 2020. <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331699/WHO-SRH-20.04-eng.pdf?ua=1>

or a safe place to turn to until the violence deescalates, this can fuel dangerous incidents of physical and sexual violence. And in New York City, where many families share small apartments and confined spaces, a stay-at-home order can feel like a prison for domestic violence survivors.

Indeed, for an abuser, isolation of their partner is one of their most formidable tools and state-mandated social distancing serves only to strengthen an abuser's hold over a survivor. The order limits survivors' and their children's access to domestic violence and mental health counseling or services. Family Justice Center and courthouse closures limit access to services and legal assistance. Closed schools and after school care programs remove teachers and staff as possible resources and confidants.

The few resources that are available also substantially disadvantage those living in poverty and immigrant communities. Public postings are rarely available in second languages. While the courthouses remain open for emergency applications, instructions on where and how to file are confusing even for attorneys and agencies. Filings require internet access to obtain the most up-to-date information, English competency to read the instructions, and continued telephone and internet access in order to file and appear virtually.

Even after physical assaults and injuries at home, the pandemic continues to fuel fears that chill reporting. Survivors are scared to seek medical treatment at hospitals for fear of exposing themselves and their families to COVID-19. Abusers use news of rampant coronavirus outbreaks in the city's jails to guilt survivors into not calling the police. The rise in racism against Asian-Americans and increasing anti-immigrant sentiment is another tool for abusers to use to further intimidate survivors, creating growing anxiety and feelings of dependency for survivors who rely on their partners for economic support and immigration status. And while "tele-health" or remote

medical and therapeutic services are being touted as a safe alternative, this does not take into account those survivors residing with their abusers, and presumes universal access to phone and internet service.

As an example of what we are seeing in the wake of the pandemic, “Tina,” a client referred by a partner domestic violence agency, called to seek advice in early April. She was sexually assaulted by her husband a few days prior and wanted to explore her options about excluding him from their home. Tina reported a rise in the frequency of her husband’s sexual advances ever since he was laid off from his job in late March. Her husband used guilt to coerce her into sex, arguing that if she did not give into his sexual demands, he would have to leave the house and find partners elsewhere which may expose him, and later her and the children, to the coronavirus. Tina also reported that it took her a while to even reach out as her husband was home all of the time. Conversations with her advocate and NYLAG had to be carefully coordinated with code words.

“Ileana,” another client referred to NYLAG in mid April, was attacked at her apartment in front of her three children, after her ex-partner posed as a FedEx delivery man to get into the building. Stuck in her home during the day, he knew exactly where to find her, and used the realities of the pandemic against her.

The clear lesson from cases like Tina’s and Ileana’s is two fold – abusers are using the pandemic as another way to control and isolate survivors, and for survivors, finding and pursuing help has become more dangerous. This is even more prevalent when we consider the financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Financial Impacts of COVID-19 for Domestic Violence Survivors**

It is well established that financial dependency is one of the leading barriers to breaking free from domestic violence abusers.<sup>2</sup> Never has that been a greater concern than now, when the unemployment rate has skyrocketed and our country's financial future looks so uncertain. Survivors living with partners who are still employed feel chained to their abusers because of the constant fear of a loss of income for the family. Survivors considering separation are unable to seek in-person HRA assistance for either submitting a new benefits application or to split up households on an existing HRA budget. For families living in public housing, survivors fear separation could jeopardize government housing benefits and vouchers.

For those survivors who are separated from their abusers, the financial impact of the COVID-19 crisis continues to present new challenges. New applications for spousal and child support are not being accepted by the Courts. There is no mechanism to enforce existing spousal or child support orders when the other party stops paying, as enforcement petitions have not been deemed emergency applications. And while the federal government's stimulus rebate has helped some families, for domestic violence survivors, it created another lightning rod for conflict when checks were deposited into an ex-partner's account. Lastly, a survivor's own job loss or loss of other financial security could lead to considerations of reconciliation with a former abuser because of ongoing financial needs.

Take for example, NYLAG's client "Linda," who separated from her abusive husband in January. Through an informal arrangement, Linda's husband continued to pay for bills and buy groceries. When delivering groceries last week, her husband got into an argument with their teenage daughter. The argument escalated and ended with Linda's husband punching and kicking

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<sup>2</sup> Niolon, P. H., Kearns, M., Dills, J., Rambo, K., Irving, S., Armstead, T., & Gilbert, L. (2017). Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan: A Technical Package of Programs, Policies, and Practices. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Linda, neighbors calling the police, and ultimately, her husband's arrest. While Linda received a temporary order of protection from Criminal Court, it did not include the children. The order also could not address her husband's retaliatory action of withholding financial support and immediately cutting off their children's cell phone and data plans, which the children relied upon for remote learning. Until Linda spoke to NYLAG, she was not aware that she could ask for temporary child support as part of a temporary order of protection. Last week, NYLAG helped Linda draft her petition and helped her obtain temporary order of protection that included her children, a temporary child support order, and an order for her husband to reinstate the children's cell phone and data plans.

### **What We Need to Support Domestic Violence Survivors in New York**

As a City, we are now faced with new challenges in almost every sector because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of those challenges are front and center and receive prominent reporting – high unemployment, low availability of testing, strained health care and essential workers. There are other challenges, though, that are hidden behind closed doors. Rising incidents and underreporting of domestic violence is one of these invisible challenges that cannot be ignored.

In the past weeks, many of us have had to pivot to work within this new reality and we should do the same to address the public safety concern of domestic violence. Legal service providers across the city, including NYLAG, are setting up dedicated COVID-19 hotlines and providing emergency legal assistance and counsel to domestic violence survivors. NYLAG's Domestic Violence Unit (DVLU) has responded to the crisis by working in partnership with Safe Horizon to assist survivors who are coming forward to draft, file, and appear in court seeking

orders of protection; in just one week, we successfully helped seven survivors file for and obtain their first orders of protection. DVLU works with case managers and social workers at other non-legal DV organizations and provides assistance and consultation for their staff in filing for orders of protection in Family Court. DVLU is safety planning with clients to help them navigate their safety in a completely new landscape. We are staffing NYLAG's COVID-19 hotline and providing people who identify as domestic violence survivors with a consultation with an attorney, individualized safety planning, and assistance with filing an Order of Protection if wanted. DVLU has increased the amount of immigration work we are doing, as that work continues during this crisis, and is imperative to our clients' financial security and stability. We have begun to translate materials and brochures into multiple languages so that information on resources and services for survivors, even in the time of a public health crisis, is accessible to all. We are also spending time to implement systems and structures to be able to adeptly respond to the expected rush of individuals in need of legal assistance when the public begins to reopen gradually. And we will be prepared to respond to the long-term crisis to come after this immediate crisis passes - we know will be a spike in survivors coming forward, seeking orders of protection, seeking assistance obtaining child support, seeking custody or parenting time that has been wrongly withheld, or seeking a divorce.

In recognition of the dual public health crises of COVID-19 and domestic violence, the City Council and the Mayor's Office can and must ensure that we are able to address the current situation and prepare for the coming effects by maintaining and increasing for services of domestic violence through critical initiatives such as the Domestic Violence & Empowerment (DOVE) Initiative. In the past few weeks, by using existing funding such as DOVE, NYLAG has nimbly pivoted to respond to the needs of New Yorkers, including survivors of domestic

violence. Continued funding is needed so that we can continue to serve survivors, all survivors, especially those who are experiencing poverty with unequal access to services.

We are proud to have pivoted our work to help survivors filing *pro se* petitions at this time. We have seen first-hand how working directly with petitioners at the filing stage provides them with a more holistic and effective response to their safety and other concerns, and we strongly believe that funding should be in place to be able to continue this work after the health crisis ends. The benefit for a client in having an attorney who works with survivors of domestic violence, rather than just a court clerk who does not have the expertise, time, resources, or ability to provide individualized client-centered services such as safety planning, advice and counsel, and access to additional services beyond the order of protection, is impossible to overstate. That is why we are doing this work now, in addition to the regular case work we continue to provide for our existing clients, whose cases we continue to work on.

The consequences of this health crisis are and will continue be multifaceted for domestic violence survivors, increasing their legal needs. We expect that some of the fall-out from this crisis, including loss of employment, lack of access to stable housing, and increased need for child or spousal support, will be reflected in an increase in the number of case matters following our city's reopening. In addressing these anticipated needs, we believe it is important, particularly for trauma survivors, to have one attorney with whom they can develop a strong, trusting relationship, to respond to their intersecting legal needs. As a result of our own comprehensive legal approach, we often have four or more cases for just one client, and may work with them for anywhere from two to six years, if not longer. Sustained, long-term funding is the only way to ensure that we can continue to respond to these intersecting needs of clients,

holistically, for the clients we have and for the prospective clients who will be in need of help after months without access to courts for any new filings besides orders of protection.

We know that because of the pandemic's economic fallout, government agencies, charitable organizations, and service providers all across the City are looking to their budgets to see where they can tighten their belts. But we must not allow fiscal concerns to irreparably harm the most vulnerable in our City. It is very likely, as we have seen in past crises, that there will be a rise in domestic violence reporting and filings for orders of protection once the "PAUSE" order is lifted. Survivors will have more opportunity to seek services and resources, to leave their homes to seek safe shelters, and to go to court and police services to ask for protection. When that time comes, we must be available with appropriate resources to meet this anticipated need, or we risk sending survivors back into the arms of their abusers.

I want to once again take the opportunity to thank Chair Richards and Chair Rosenthal, and the members of their, Committees for their exceptional leadership and commitment to address this issue even during these difficult times. I welcome the opportunity to discuss any of these matters with the Committee further.

Respectfully submitted,

New York Legal Assistance Group



Testimony from Women for Afghan Women (WAW)  
NYC Hearing on The Impact of COVID-19 on Domestic Violence in New York City  
May 1, 2020

[Women for Afghan Women](#) thanks the Committee on Women and Gender Equity and the Committee on Public Safety for this opportunity to update the New York City Council on the impact of COVID-19 among survivors and victims of domestic violence in the Afghan, South Asian, and Muslim immigrant communities of New York City.

Our New York Community Center staff started working remotely on March 18th following official guidelines to lessen the risk of exposure to COVID-19. Since then, Women for Afghan Women has already reached out to over 5,000 community members. We have been operating and providing services through emails, phone hotline, Zoom, and Facetime.

Our casework team has continued to diligently work with survivors and victims of domestic violence because we understand that home is not safe for everyone. The team has been taking calls beyond regular work hours to make sure survivors have a place to reach out and ask for help. We have not only been working with individual domestic violence clients, but also with their entire families, by connecting them to resources appropriate for them. WAW's attorney has also been providing consultations and services remotely.

We have seen an increase in domestic violence cases following the lockdown in New York. Women for Afghan Women has assisted survivors in finding a safe place and receive support to provide for themselves and their children. Because many in our community do not speak English fluently or are unfamiliar with various government systems and procedures, they rely on us to connect them to essential services, including basic necessities like food, healthcare, and shelter. We are also helping survivors who have lost their sources of income to file for unemployment and other financial support.

All of our staff members have stepped up to assist survivors in our community because of the increase in our domestic violence cases. We are constantly providing counseling via phone, helping survivors access critical resources and basic needs, and one staff member provided financial support out of her own pocket to a survivor who recently got out of her abusive relationship, lost her job due to the pandemic, has no support network, and has to care for her infant child by herself.

We have also provided delivery and pick-up service of groceries and medications for survivors who cannot leave their homes and those with medical conditions that make them at-risk for severe COVID-19.

Our community was already facing so many challenges under "normal circumstances" because of how taboo speaking out about domestic violence is in the community. Though this has changed over the years with Women for Afghan Women's work in the community, it persists with older community members and newly arrived immigrants. It takes a long time, several sessions of counseling, and a lot of support from our staff for domestic violence survivors to take steps towards getting out of years of abusive relationships.

For example, since New York was put on PAUSE, we have had two clients who came forward about living in an abusive relationship—one after 26 years of marriage and another after 18 years of marriage. This is how long some survivors wait, because they are facing so many challenges. Both women at the moment just want someone to share their story with, someone they can trust, and someone who believes them, listens to them, and supports them. When they are ready to take additional steps, we will continue to be there to provide them with the services they are ready to receive.

Women for Afghan Women is there for each survivor from day one until they are ready to stand on their own. This is how we supported our domestic violence clients before and this is the same kind of comprehensive support we are offering now.

Our work has always been essential, and now more than ever, because Women for Afghan Women is the only organization that offers support to survivors in Dari and Pashto in all of New York. While survivors can request for interpretation services, the interpreters available often do not speak the same language as the survivor.

For example, we had a survivor who was an Afghan woman and only spoke Dari. She had never been to school in her life. When she requested for an interpreter, they could only provide a Farsi-speaking one. For the survivor, it was impossible to communicate with the interpreter. Though the languages are similar, there are still many words that get lost in translation. The same thing happens for survivors who speak the Afghan variant of Pashto. Most interpreters in New York speak Pakistani Pashto, which cannot be understood by survivors who have never been to Pakistan.

Women for Afghan Women fills this gap. City agencies call us for language support. Our local precinct, hospitals, doctor's offices, law offices, partner community organizations, and the Family Justice Centers know that they can call us. Because of this, we are the first number survivors in our community call, because of the trust they have in us and for our culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate services.

Altogether, our diverse staff members, who are from the same immigrant communities we serve, provide services in six languages—Dari, Farsi, Pashto, Urdu, Hindi, and Spanish—in addition to English.

Women for Afghan Women is a lifeline for these survivors who face many challenges in accessing services and benefits due to cultural and linguistic limitations and being from New York City's low-income, isolated, and aging communities of color.

Our community is largely located in Queens, which is the hardest hit borough in New York City. During this pandemic, our community, especially survivors of domestic violence, are at risk of facing grave consequences if their needs are overlooked.

Continued funding support from the City would allow us to ensure the safety of the survivors and their families who depend on our services. We respectfully request for the City Council to ensure that discretionary funding will not decrease during this most critical and vulnerable time for survivors in New York.

Women for Afghan Women thanks the City Council for its support and we hope to continue this essential work during this crisis with you.



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**Testimony of New Destiny Housing Corporation  
Joint Hearing by Committee on Women and Gender Equity and The Committee on Public Safety**

**May 1, 2020**

**Presented by  
Carol Corden, Executive Director**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today at this Joint Oversight Hearing regarding the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on domestic violence in New York City. My name is Carol Corden and I am the Executive Director at New Destiny Housing Corporation, a 26-year old not-for-profit committed to ending the cycle of domestic violence and homelessness by connecting families to safe, permanent housing and services. New Destiny currently owns and operates six service-enriched affordable housing projects where at least half of the apartments are set aside for homeless domestic violence survivors and their children, and operates a rapid rehousing program that has connected 109 survivors and their families to permanent housing since 2014.

As frontline service providers at the intersection of domestic violence and affordable housing, we are here today to speak not only about the current needs of survivors of domestic violence but also about the long term strategies that would support survivors in maintaining safety and stability through future uncertain times. Regardless of any external factors, victims of domestic violence who are still residing with their abuser are always at risk of escalated violence. However, the environment created by the pandemic - forced isolation with abusers and economic instability – has increased these risks exponentially and many survivors are reporting an increase in violence against them. Prior to the pandemic, many of these clients may have considered entering shelter or temporarily staying with friends or family, but these are now less viable or safe options. This is because DV shelter vacancy remains low, congregate shelters are inherently at greater risk of spreading infectious disease, moving into a new household may also put the members of this household or the survivor at risk of contracting Covid-19.

It is clear that survivors of domestic violence need the City to look for new and innovative solutions to assist them in moving into safe housing. Two such options would be using hotel rooms to house survivors forced to shelter in place with their abuser and expanding the availability of all vouchers and programs, including the Homeless Set Aside Program and Augmented CityFHEPS, to be available to individuals and families in the DV shelter system.

The city has already begun renting hotel rooms for people experiencing homelessness who have tested positive for Covid-19. This could be expanded to additional hotels that are either closed or have low occupancy rates and used to temporarily house survivors currently at risk of being harmed until the pandemic is over and they are able to safely return home or find other housing.

The Homeless Set Aside Program and Augmented CityFHEPS are two innovative programs that connect certain New Yorkers experiencing homelessness with affordable housing units around the city. However, only those New Yorkers in the DHS homeless shelter system are granted access to these programs. All other shelter systems, including the HRA domestic violence shelter system are excluded. As affordable housing projects remain some of the few apartments still consistently leasing new units in these times, it is more important than ever that the DV shelter system receive equal treatment under city housing programs.

While the usage of hotel rooms and equal access to housing programs would greatly assist survivors currently living with an abuser or in a shelter, long term thinking is also needed right now to ensure that this population does not face the same level of instability during future financial, health or other public crises. Any long term solutions should focus on just on shelter, but also on permanent housing options. One such option is investing in rapid rehousing. New Destiny's rapid rehousing program, HousingLink, is operated in partnership with the Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender Based Violence. HousingLink connects survivors of domestic violence with vacant re-rental units managed by affordable housing providers throughout New York City.

HousingLink staff are co-located in five borough-based Family Justice Centers, operated by the Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender Based Violence, that serve as one-stop comprehensive service centers for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. This unique program is based on a HUD best practice for families at risk of homelessness that has been successfully operated in other parts of the country for domestic violence survivors who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

HousingLink offers an alternative to shelter for New York City survivors fleeing domestic violence who are in unsafe or unstable housing and are trying to avoid becoming homeless. Through the program, New Destiny has been able to place 109 households in permanent, affordable housing – helping them to avoid shelter or to significantly shorten their shelter stay. And, the vast majority of those placed have retained their housing for well over one year.

Based on our experience, we know rapid rehousing is a cost-effective approach that can reduce the number of survivors using shelter as well as the traumatic effects of homelessness for victims and their children and can do this even in a high-cost housing market like New York City.

While many people have never experienced the housing and financial instability caused by Covid-19, low income survivors of domestic violence face these challenges every day. The pandemic has only amplified their challenges and decreased their options. Now is the time to take action to ensure that survivors are

not forced to shelter in place with a person who is harming them and expand options for them to find long term safe housing even after the pandemic has ended.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today and I welcome any questions you may have.

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**Center for Court Innovation Testimony**  
**New York City Council**  
**Committee on Women Committee on Women and Gender Equity**  
**Jointly with the Committee on Public Safety**  
**The Impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on Domestic Violence in New York City**

**May 1, 2020**

**COVID and Intimate Partner Violence**

The COVID crisis has exposed what we already knew to be true: intimate partner violence (IPV) is an epidemic in our communities.

The Center has seen the impact of COVID and the stay-at-home order through our programs that work with survivors, families, young people and people who cause harm. This testimony will outline what we have learned through the full spectrum of our work serving survivors, working in community, and working with people who cause harm.

**Organizational Overview & Experience**

The Center's mission is to help create a more effective and humane justice system by designing and implementing operating programs, performing original research, and providing reformers around the world with the tools they need to launch new strategies. The Center's experience and expertise in working with both survivors of violence as well as those who cause harm give us a unique perspective on possible responses to intimate partner violence.

In addition to our work in New York City, the Center works with over 60 jurisdictions across the country on improving their responses to intimate partner violence. Since the COVID crisis, the Center has been hosting weekly calls for domestic violence attorneys, advocates, batterer intervention program facilitators, and prosecutors to share experiences and strategize responses.

*The message from across the country is the same as what we have heard here in New York: it is both more important than ever and harder than ever to access services for both survivors and people who cause harm. We are working hard to meet the need by harnessing the power of community to meet people where they are.*

## **Serving Survivors**

Our community-based victim service program at the Red Hook Community Justice Center, Red Hook CARES (Counseling and Restorative Services) has received critical support from the Council's DOVE Initiative for the past 3 years. Red Hook CARES provides advocacy, counseling, and case management to individuals who have experienced or witnessed crime and violence. Beyond providing these services, Red Hook CARES also seeks to empower clients to achieve stability, safety, and healing in their lives; and to foster a healthier and more resilient community by offering safe, accessible, free, and confidential services.

In the wake of COVID-19, Red Hook CARES immediately pivoted to providing all services remotely. CARES has continued to receive referrals of new clients, predominantly survivors of intimate partner violence, and provide crisis counseling, safety planning and advocacy in both English and Spanish. Red Hook CARES has also continued to run a weekly support group for survivors of intimate partner violence through a videoconference platform. These clients are facing tremendous barriers to safety with partial or total loss of income making it hard to meet basic needs, fear around going into shelter, and barriers to access for clients who are non-citizens or don't speak English. With the support of DOVE funding, Red Hook CARES has been able to provide emergency financial support for food, hygiene supplies and digital gift cards to purchase formula, diapers and wipes for their children.

### **Affirmative Outreach**

After shelter-in-place orders were given, we knew we could not wait for those in need to find us. The Red Hook Community Justice Center developed a telephone survey to public housing residents in Red Hook. We have reached over 300 household in our first month of emergency response, resulting in 150 surveys completed where residents identified urgent needs for follow-up, including emergency food, medical concerns, mental health support, and tenant rights.

## **Working in Community to Prevent Violence**

The Center also operates the RISE Project (Reimagining Intimacy through Social Engagement) in partnership with the Mayor's Office to Prevent Gun Violence, which seeks to build the capacity of 22 community-based Crisis Management System anti-gun violence sites to respond to IPV. RISE is a community-based initiative that uses restorative and public health approaches to facilitate community norms change, IPV prevention, and voluntary engagement of individuals causing harm. RISE implements trainings, workshops, community healing events, and gender-based groups and regularly engages in community and street outreach. In its first six months, RISE has reached more than 4,000 NYC residents.

The Center has extensive experience operating community-based voluntary programming, working with marginalized and difficult to reach populations including justice-involved individuals and individuals at high risk of community violence. The Center's model is trauma-informed, culturally relevant, and deeply informed by the community and population served. The Center's operating programs have been documented to achieve concrete results including improved outcomes for individuals, neighborhoods, and municipal and state governments.

This approach echoes what we know to be more true than ever: we cannot respond to intimate partner violence only through system based strategies. Our research has confirmed that survivors from communities of color and LGBTQ communities in particular seek interventions that are culturally relevant, and that will also address the harm in the context of social, economic, and cultural realities. Participants from communities of color stressed the need for interventions outside the criminal legal system that would not jeopardize their partners or family with deportation or incarceration. As one survivor said, “I needed support that did not demonize undocumented men of color.”

In addition to the RISE Project, the Center also uses restorative justice circles to address intimate partner violence with teens in schools. We continue to see that young people want to access these kinds of approaches to reduce violence during the COVID lock down.

### **Working with people who cause harm**

The Center has a long-standing commitment to working with those accused of causing harm to address those harms and prevent reoffending through working with defendants in the criminal justice system. Since the Criminal Justice Reform Act went into effect on Jan 1 of this year, our Supervised Release programs, that provides a community supervision alternative to pretrial detention, received 368 referrals of defendants in IPV cases. This supervision has been successful in preventing re-offending, with only 22 of those being re-arrested for any charge.

We believe that it is critical that this service be continued during the COVID lockdown however because of difficulty with court access we have not received any new referrals after March 16, despite the fact that over 30% of ALL ARRESTS are currently for IPV.

<b>CCI Supervised Release IPV Releases<sup>1</sup>: January 1 through April 23 2020</b>				
<b>Month 2020</b>	<b>Brooklyn</b>	<b>Bronx</b>	<b>Staten Island</b>	<b>Total in month</b>
January	88	29	15	132
February	102	29	23	154
March 1 - March 16	45	15	22	82
March 17 - April 23	0	0	0	0
<b>Total by borough</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>368</b>

<sup>1</sup>Five SRP clients appear twice in the data: each were re-released to the program on separate IPV charge re-arrests since January 1

To address the needs of those supervised release clients with IPV cases, the Center, with support from the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, and in partnership with CASES and the New York City Criminal Justice Agency, has hired and trained facilitators to provide a free, one-time three-hour class called Tactics and Choices. There are three Tactics and Choices curricula, respectively for cis male clients, cis female clients, and LGBTQ+ clients. The curriculum for male clients was originally developed by Men Stopping Violence. The women’s adaptation was created by the Center for Court Innovation. The LGBTQ+ adaptation was created by the New York City Anti-Violence Project. Clients can choose which class to attend based on their identity. Interpreters can be available, and the class will be regularly offered in Spanish. Center staff is identifying ways to offer the class online to

continue to support and engage those defendants who were arraigned on intimate partner violence (IPV)-related offenses in New York City and placed in the Supervised Release Program.

Thank you to the Council for holding this critical hearing and providing us with an opportunity to share our work. We look forward to our continued partnership to promote safe and healthy communities.



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**Center for Court Innovation Testimony**  
**New York City Council**  
**Committee on Women Committee on Women and Gender Equity**  
**Jointly with the Committee on Public Safety**  
**The Impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on Domestic Violence in New York City**

**May 1, 2020**

**COVID and Intimate Partner Violence**

The COVID crisis has exposed what we already knew to be true: intimate partner violence (IPV) is an epidemic in our communities.

The Center has seen the impact of COVID and the stay-at-home order through our programs that work with survivors, families, young people and people who cause harm. This testimony will outline what we have learned through the full spectrum of our work serving survivors, working in community, and working with people who cause harm.

**Organizational Overview & Experience**

The Center's mission is to help create a more effective and humane justice system by designing and implementing operating programs, performing original research, and providing reformers around the world with the tools they need to launch new strategies. The Center's experience and expertise in working with both survivors of violence as well as those who cause harm give us a unique perspective on possible responses to intimate partner violence.

In addition to our work in New York City, the Center works with over 60 jurisdictions across the country on improving their responses to intimate partner violence. Since the COVID crisis, the Center has been hosting weekly calls for domestic violence attorneys, advocates, batterer intervention program facilitators, and prosecutors to share experiences and strategize responses.

*The message from across the country is the same as what we have heard here in New York: it is both more important than ever and harder than ever to access services for both survivors and people who cause harm. We are working hard to meet the need by harnessing the power of community to meet people where they are.*

## **Serving Survivors**

Our community-based victim service program at the Red Hook Community Justice Center, Red Hook CARES (Counseling and Restorative Services) has received critical support from the Council's DOVE Initiative for the past 3 years. Red Hook CARES provides advocacy, counseling, and case management to individuals who have experienced or witnessed crime and violence. Beyond providing these services, Red Hook CARES also seeks to empower clients to achieve stability, safety, and healing in their lives; and to foster a healthier and more resilient community by offering safe, accessible, free, and confidential services.

In the wake of COVID-19, Red Hook CARES immediately pivoted to providing all services remotely. CARES has continued to receive referrals of new clients, predominantly survivors of intimate partner violence, and provide crisis counseling, safety planning and advocacy in both English and Spanish. Red Hook CARES has also continued to run a weekly support group for survivors of intimate partner violence through a videoconference platform. These clients are facing tremendous barriers to safety with partial or total loss of income making it hard to meet basic needs, fear around going into shelter, and barriers to access for clients who are non-citizens or don't speak English. With the support of DOVE funding, Red Hook CARES has been able to provide emergency financial support for food, hygiene supplies and digital gift cards to purchase formula, diapers and wipes for their children.

### **Affirmative Outreach**

After shelter-in-place orders were given, we knew we could not wait for those in need to find us. The Red Hook Community Justice Center developed a telephone survey to public housing residents in Red Hook. We have reached over 300 household in our first month of emergency response, resulting in 150 surveys completed where residents identified urgent needs for follow-up, including emergency food, medical concerns, mental health support, and tenant rights.

## **Working in Community to Prevent Violence**

The Center also operates the RISE Project (Reimagining Intimacy through Social Engagement) in partnership with the Mayor's Office to Prevent Gun Violence, which seeks to build the capacity of 22 community-based Crisis Management System anti-gun violence sites to respond to IPV. RISE is a community-based initiative that uses restorative and public health approaches to facilitate community norms change, IPV prevention, and voluntary engagement of individuals causing harm. RISE implements trainings, workshops, community healing events, and gender-based groups and regularly engages in community and street outreach. In its first six months, RISE has reached more than 4,000 NYC residents.

The Center has extensive experience operating community-based voluntary programming, working with marginalized and difficult to reach populations including justice-involved individuals and individuals at high risk of community violence. The Center's model is trauma-informed, culturally relevant, and deeply informed by the community and population served. The Center's operating programs have been documented to achieve concrete results including improved outcomes for individuals, neighborhoods, and municipal and state governments.

This approach echoes what we know to be more true than ever: we cannot respond to intimate partner violence only through system based strategies. Our research has confirmed that survivors from communities of color and LGBTQ communities in particular seek interventions that are culturally relevant, and that will also address the harm in the context of social, economic, and cultural realities. Participants from communities of color stressed the need for interventions outside the criminal legal system that would not jeopardize their partners or family with deportation or incarceration. As one survivor said, “I needed support that did not demonize undocumented men of color.”

In addition to the RISE Project, the Center also uses restorative justice circles to address intimate partner violence with teens in schools. We continue to see that young people want to access these kinds of approaches to reduce violence during the COVID lock down.

### **Working with people who cause harm**

The Center has a long-standing commitment to working with those accused of causing harm to address those harms and prevent reoffending through working with defendants in the criminal justice system. Since the Criminal Justice Reform Act went into effect on Jan 1 of this year, our Supervised Release programs, that provides a community supervision alternative to pretrial detention, received 368 referrals of defendants in IPV cases. This supervision has been successful in preventing re-offending, with only 22 of those being re-arrested for any charge.

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To address the needs of those supervised release clients with IPV cases, the Center, with support from the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, and in partnership with CASES and the New York City Criminal Justice Agency, has hired and trained facilitators to provide a free, one-time three-hour class called Tactics and Choices. There are three Tactics and Choices curricula, respectively for cis male clients, cis female clients, and LGBTQ+ clients. The curriculum for male clients was originally developed by Men Stopping Violence. The women’s adaptation was created by the Center for Court Innovation. The LGBTQ+ adaptation was created by the New York City Anti-Violence Project. Clients can choose which class to attend based on their identity. Interpreters can be available, and the class will be regularly offered in Spanish. Center staff is identifying ways to offer the class online to

continue to support and engage those defendants who were arraigned on intimate partner violence (IPV)-related offenses in New York City and placed in the Supervised Release Program.

Thank you to the Council for holding this critical hearing and providing us with an opportunity to share our work. We look forward to our continued partnership to promote safe and healthy communities.

Appendix 1: Reimagine Intimacy through Social Engagement  
Community Domestic Violence Intervention Model

Appendix 2: Examples of RISE Outreach During Covid-19

Appendix 3: Pre-Trial Detention Domestic Violence Supervised  
Release Overview

Appendix 1: Reimagine Intimacy through Social Engagement  
Community Domestic Violence Intervention Model



Target areas with recorded IPV saturation, and apply community intervention

From 2010-2017,

The Bronx had the highest number and per capita rate of IPV homicides

11.4% (32) of IPV homicides occurred at a NYCHA residence, while 4.6% of the City's population resides in a NYCHA residence.



Draw from best practices, the CURE Violence model, and leverage SOS Bronx site, to:

**Engage Individuals Causing Harm:** create non-mandated programs for individuals causing harm.

**Train Credible Messengers:** Identify credible messengers to address toxic masculinity, and train on IPV.

**Educate Community :** Local community engagement to increase awareness of, and reduce tolerance of IPV.

## Bronx Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Community Intervention Pilot



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Courtney Bryan, Director

## Center for Court Innovation Community-Based IPV Prevention

### Overview

Domestic violence rates have dropped over the past 30 years, but recently that decline has stagnated and in New York City domestic violence related crime is not falling at the same level as crime overall. Current criminal legal approaches are not enough to solve the problem in its entirety. The Center aims to reduce rates of intimate partner violence (“IPV”) in the Bronx utilizing a comprehensive community-based approach.

### Background

The project will build on the Center’s experience developing and launching RISE, a city-wide initiative addressing the intersection of IPV and gun violence in partnership with the Mayor’s Office to Prevent Gun Violence, as well as the Seeding Generations project<sup>1</sup>, a blueprint for working with individuals who cause harm, and the Center’s deep experience addressing trauma and healing with young men of color through the Make It Happen program.

### Need

In recent years, New York City has experienced a steep reduction in crime across the five boroughs. Domestic violence crimes and perpetration have not seen similar reductions. The number of domestic violence homicides or near homicides are shocking. Domestic violence now accounts for one in every five homicides, and two in every five reported felony assaults.<sup>2</sup> In 2016 over 5,000 of the individuals held at Rikers were there for DV related charges. From 2010-2017, the Bronx had the highest number of intimate partner homicides (84), as well as the highest per capita rate of intimate partner homicides – almost two times higher than the rate in any other borough. Data from the Mayor’s Office to End Gender-Based Violence reflects an urgent need to provide services in the Bronx.

- In 2018, 7 of the 10 precincts with the highest rates of domestic violence incidents in New York City were located in the Bronx.
- The Bronx had the highest rate of chronic domestic violence complaints in the city.
- Domestic violence related incidents account for approximately 20-25% of all crime in Bronx neighborhoods with the highest rates of reported crime.

### Project Model

The project will draw from the CURE violence model of violence prevention focusing on community norms change, training credible messengers within communities, and engaging individuals causing harm in their relationships. The approach will support holistic community efforts around healing, violence reduction, and community change. This includes efforts to bring conversations around IPV to public spaces, facilitation of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.courtinnovation.org/publications/seedinggenerations>

<sup>2</sup> New York City Domestic Violence Task Force Annual Report, 2018.

gender-based circles, opportunities for healing, community building and advocacy. The project will incorporate the following components:

### Engaging Individuals Who Cause Harm

Currently there are few resources or non-mandated programs for individuals who have caused harm and few programs designed specifically to center communities of color who experience high rates of community violence and criminal justice contact.

- **Group Interventions:** voluntary community-based groups will safely engage individuals who cause harm, challenge harmful behaviors, build accountability, and provide access to additional resources.
- **Individual Engagement:** individual interventions to support lasting change and address underlying issues will be facilitated by a trained case manager with individuals who have caused harm.

### Community Engagement & Capacity Building

A robust neighborhood-based community capacity building strategy will be implemented.

- **Credible Messengers:** credible messengers will be identified in each neighborhood. Staff will provide incentivized training on reducing community tolerance for IPV, addressing toxic masculinity, and promoting safety to support local credible messengers to adopt messaging around healthy relationships.
- **Public Education Campaigns:** localized campaigns targeting individuals causing harm to send the message that communities will no longer tolerate intimate partner violence will be implemented.
- **Training & Community Events:** Culturally relevant trainings will be provided to local organizations. Community education workshops will address the needs of various ages groups. Innovative community events will support space for healing and community building.
- **Resource Coordination & Technical Assistance:** the project will strengthen community response to IPV at the neighborhood level by building connections with community-based organizations and city-wide partners to increase community access. Technical assistance will be provided to CBOs and community groups.

### Restorative Community Based Accountability

A community-based accountability process will be available for IPV survivors and those who are causing them harm, where both people voluntarily elect to address the violence with the support of members of their community. The focus of the process is to name and stop the violence, demand responsibility from the person causing it and to promote healing for all affected.

### Community Norms Change

Localized community norms change strategies will support healthy relationships and reduce tolerance for IPV.

- **Community Outreach & Engagement**
- **Physical/Built Environment Assessment:** A neighborhood assessment will be completed utilizing a gendered CPTED (crime prevention through environmental design) lens to identify opportunities for placemaking and physical built environment changes that will build protective factors.

### **Impact**

The RISE Project is currently in its first implementation year, but initial feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. With expanded funding, the Center will have the capacity to conduct research on the community-based model including qualitative and quantitative data to assess the community impact of the project, as well as potential for replication.

### **Proposal**

The initiative will focus on the Bronx neighborhoods with the highest rates of reported domestic violence incidents in 2019 including Soundview, South Bronx, Edenwald, Wakefield, and Fordham. This work will build on the city-wide domestic violence prevention work the Center is already leading through the RISE Project. The Center will leverage its deep experience in gender and family justice work, as well as its community and neighborhood safety projects to support project rollout.



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## Center for Court Innovation Community-Based IPV Prevention

### Overview

While domestic violence rates have dropped drastically over the past 30 years, recently that decline has stagnated and in some neighborhoods rates are now rising. Current criminal legal approaches are a part of the solution, but not enough to solve the problem in its entirety. The Center aims to reduce rates of intimate partner violence (“IPV”) in neighborhoods with the highest rates of reported domestic violence incidents utilizing a comprehensive community-based approach. Specifically, this project would focus on community norms change and capacity building, as well as engagement and service provision for individuals causing harm. The project will build community tools and capacity to prevent abuse, strengthen positive community norms around healthy relationships, reduce tolerance for IPV, and engage individuals who have caused harm. The community-driven and survivor-informed approach will prioritize the principles of safety, accountability, and transformative justice.

### Background

The project will build on the Center’s experience developing and launching RISE, a city-wide initiative addressing the intersection of IPV and gun violence in partnership with the Mayor’s Office to Prevent Gun Violence, as well as the Seeding Generations project<sup>1</sup>, a blueprint for working with individuals who cause harm, and the Center’s deep experience addressing trauma and healing with young men of color through the Make It Happen program.

### Need

New York neighborhoods most impacted by the criminal justice system also have the highest rates of domestic incident reports and felony level domestic assaults. Domestic incidents account for approximately 20-25% of all crime across neighborhoods with the highest crime rates. The neighborhoods with the highest rates including Edenwald/Wakefield, Soundview, the South Bronx, East NY and Brownsville, Jamaica Queens, the North Shore Staten Island, and East Harlem have incident rates more than double the city-wide average. These neighborhoods also lack community-based, culturally relevant resources focused on intimate partner violence. Often community members struggle to access city-wide or borough-wide resources due to difficulties with travel, safety, or concern accessing spaces like family justice centers which are located in courts. There are few services available that are reflective of and culturally responsive to the communities where individuals live. Few also center an intersectional approach that understands the multiple layers of violence and marginalization communities of color experience.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.courtinnovation.org/publications/seedinggenerations>

The lack of community-based public education and efforts focused on these issues lead to a lack of community engagement, public discussion, and engagement around healthy relationships. Additionally, while focus on survivors is imperative, there are little to no resources for individuals who cause harm. To truly disrupt the cycle of violence and address the connection between community violence, intimate partner violence, and reducing the negative impacts of the criminal justice system, individuals who have caused harm have to be engaged as active participants in changing their behavior.

## **Project Proposal**

The project will focus on promoting healthy relationship norms and reducing intimate partner violence through community capacity building and intentional engagement of individuals who have caused harm. The program will be highly localized and responsive to each neighborhood's needs and build on community strengths and values that support prevention and healthy, safe relationships and communities. Staff will complete a neighborhood assessment and develop an action plan comprised of the following components: community engagement, capacity building, public education, training, and placemaking.

### Engaging Individuals Who Cause Harm

A major focus will be engaging individuals who have caused harm. Currently there are few resources or non-mandated programs for individuals who have caused harm.

#### Community Groups

Voluntary community based group interventions designed to safely engage individuals who cause harm, challenge harmful behaviors, build accountability, and provide holistic access to additional resources and services will be implemented.

#### Individual Engagement

Transformative justice and healing centered interventions to support lasting change will be available to individuals who have caused harm and are looking to change their future behavior. This may include community accountability processes, restorative justice approaches, and connection to additional resources to address related issues such as employment, substance use, or housing.

#### Public Education Campaigns

A localized public education campaign targeting individuals causing harm will be implemented. Building on the Center's successful public education campaigns on community violence messaging will be developed to reach those who are causing harm with the goal of engaging them in services.

### Community Engagement & Capacity Building

A robust neighborhood-based community capacity building strategy, leveraging grassroots organizations, city agencies, community-based organizations, and faith-based institutions to build networks and resources to respond to community needs around IPV will be implemented.

#### Training

Culturally relevant trainings will engage local CBO's, grassroots community organizations, and faith-based groups to on topics including but not limited to; IPV 101, healthy relationships, toxic masculinity, trauma & healing, supporting individuals who have been harmed, and engaging individuals who have caused harm.

#### Resource Coordination & Technical Assistance

The project will strengthen community response to IPV at the neighborhood level by building connections with community-based organizations and city-wide partners to increase community access

and creating bridges to resources utilizing an intersectional approach to address barriers residents face when attempting to access services. Technical assistance will be provided to local CBOs and community groups in need of guidance on how to respond when incidents of IPV arise among participants, families, or neighbors. Staff will be available as a resource for community members encountering relevant issues among participants, family, friends, or neighbors.

#### Community Based Workshops

Community education workshops on a variety of topics related to IPV will address the needs of various ages groups and will be facilitated at local schools, community centers, and senior centers creating public space and dialogue around healthy relationships.

#### Community Norms Change

Localized community norms change strategies will support healthy relationships and reduce tolerance for IPV.

#### Community Outreach & Engagement

Coordinators will have a visible presence in the community. This will include an outreach presence at community events and regular community canvassing.

#### Physical/Built Environment Assessment

A growing body of work has shown the potential of placemaking, or strategic transformation of public spaces, reduce IPV.<sup>2</sup> A neighborhood assessment will be completed utilizing a gendered CPTED (crime prevention through environmental design) lens to identify opportunities for placemaking and physical built environment changes that will build protective factors such as collective efficacy, social cohesion, reduced stress, and decreased isolation to support decreases in domestic violence.

#### Transformative Justice

Transformative and healing justice approaches that support holistic community efforts around healing, violence reduction, and community change will be incorporated. This includes opportunities for community healing, transformative circles, and integrating a healthy relationships lens into community initiatives focused on public safety, collective efficacy, and positive community change.

#### Survivor Leadership

The project will also create a city-wide survivor leadership board that will advise the project development, elevate survivor voices at the community level, and ensure survivor perspective, safety, and wellness are centered in the community based strategies. Board members will meet regularly and will also work in collaboration with project coordinators to hold neighborhood survivor listening sessions designed to elicit survivor perspective in localized project rollout, as well as elevate survivor voices at the community level and bring the conversations around intimate partner violence into the public sphere. Board members will receive stipends for their leadership and participation.

#### **Impact**

The RISE Project is currently in its first implementation year, but initial feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. RISE has engaged in over 150 community events, workshops, and trainings on intimate partner violence and healthy relationships. With expanded funding, the Center will have the capacity to conduct research on the

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.preventconnect.org/2019/06/resources-and-reflections-from-what-surrounds-us-shapes-us/>

community-based model including qualitative and quantitative data to assess the community impact of the project, as well as potential for replication.

## **Proposal**

The initiative will focus on the neighborhoods with the highest rates of reported domestic violence incidents in the first 2 quarters of 2019. This work will build on the city-wide domestic violence prevention work the Center is already leading through the RISE project and the community based violence prevention and neighborhood safety work occurring at the Center's community based projects across the 5 boroughs. Staff will be co-located at current Center sites in each borough. The Center will leverage its deep experience in gender and family justice work, as well as its community and neighborhood safety projects to support project rollout. Each neighborhood will be staffed by a community coordinator with oversight from the project director and support from a program manager and operations associate. The Center will focus on the following neighborhoods:

### **Bronx**

Community Coordinator 1- South Bronx, Soundview

Community Coordinator 2- West Bronx, Fordham

Community Coordinator 3- North Bronx, Edenwald, Wakefield

### **Brooklyn**

Community Coordinator 1- Crown Heights, Flatbush

Community Coordinator 2- Brownsville, East New York

### **Queens**

Community Coordinator- Jamaica, Queensbridge

### **Staten Island**

Community Coordinator- North Shore

### **Manhattan**

Community Coordinator- East Harlem/Central Harlem

## Appendix 2: Examples of RISE Outreach During Covid-19

[View this email in your browser](#)



**Reminder for this week Upcoming RISE Virtual Events !**

**THURSDAY: RISE OPEN MIC**

**Zoom Meeting ID: 324 875 491 Password: 979308**

["Click here"](#)

VIRTUAL OPEN MIC  
PRESENTED BY WOUNDED. NOT BROKEN &  
THE RISE PROJECT

**REAL TALK:  
MY BODY IS  
MY BODY**

Thursday, April 30th 6:30pm [tinyurl.com/realtalkrise](https://tinyurl.com/realtalkrise)

For more info contact [betancesk@courtinovation.org](mailto:betancesk@courtinovation.org) or  
[davisg@neighborsinaction.org](mailto:davisg@neighborsinaction.org)

Logos at the bottom: RISE, Wounded Not Broken, Neighbors in Action, and S.O.S. BROOKLYN.

**FRIDAY: SELF LOVE IS THE BEST LOVE**

**Zoom Meeting ID: 954 7917 3682**

["Click here"](#)

**SELF LOVE IS THE BEST LOVE!**

**CMS STAFF ONLY**

**RISE ANNOUNCEMENT DURING WORKSHOP!!!**

FRIDAY MAY 1 @ 1PM

Zoom Meeting ID:  
954 7917 3682

FACILITATED BY COORDINATORS  
KEYLA AND KAROLIN

Reach out to us if you want to talk or get more information.

Email:  
riseproject@courttinnovation.org

FOLLOW US @RISEPROJECTNYC **RISE**

FOLLOW RISE ON INSTAGRAM

*RISE Live*

RISE PROJECT NYC  
EVERY TUESDAY AND THURSDAY AT 5PM  
TUNE IN!

FOLLOW RISE ON TWITTER

RISE is proud to be a part of the city's Crisis Management System supporting the safety and healing of our communities.



**MOCJ NYC** @CrimJusticeNYC · 10h

NYC's Crisis Management System continues to lift communities and help them heal in response to #COVID19. Thank you to @elite\_learners @SOS\_Brooklyn @riseprojectnyc and so many others who are supporting New Yorkers stay safe and healthy (via @News12BK)

## FOLLOW RISE ON FACEBOOK



**RISE Project**

5 hrs · 🌐



We are here to help. We are a resource. Reach out of us with any questions you have or to discuss a relating topic. [#RISENYC](#) [#IPVAwareness](#) [#COVID...](#) See More

RISE Project is here and available to provide assistance and guidance with addressing intimate partner violence during COVID-19.

What is RISE doing to stay engaged?

Weekly RISE Talks posted every Wednesday

Weekly RISE Live on Tuesday and Thursday discussing a wide variety of topics including healthy relationships, self love, love and media, etc.

We are also offering workshops and virtual events via Zoom!

For inquiries or more details please visit our social media accounts (DM US) or email us at [riseproject@courtinnovation.org](mailto:riseproject@courtinnovation.org)



## Reimagining Intimacy Through Social Engagement

**RISE Project is a city-wide initiative that responds to and prevents intimate partner violence in our neighborhoods. RISE builds awareness on the impact of IPV by engaging communities in conversations around trauma, abuse, and healthy relationships while creating healing spaces.**

**RISE is intentional about working closely with people who cause harm in their relationship and aiding in community responses to violence. RISE is a part of the crisis management**



Instagram



Email

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## Appendix 3: Pre-Trial Detention Domestic Violence Supervised Release Overview

**CAN SUPERVISED RELEASE CLIENTS WHO ARE NOT EXPLICITLY ORDERED TO TACTICS AND CHOICES CHOOSE TO ATTEND VOLUNTARILY?**

**YES.** In fact, clients arraigned on IPV-related offenses will be encouraged by their case manager to attend—although if the judge did not order participation, there is no penalty for opting not to attend. It is the individual’s choice.

**IS THERE ANY BENEFIT TO CLIENTS FOR ATTENDING TACTICS AND CHOICES VOLUNTARILY?**

**YES.** The class offers participants an overview of basic principles of power and control dynamics and uses an interactive format to introduce strategies for making healthy, nonviolent choices in intimate relationships. In addition, for participants who are assigned to Tier 2 of the Supervised Release Program, if they attend Tactics and Choices voluntarily, they will be exempted from one session that would have otherwise been mandated of structured cognitive-behavioral therapy.

**WILL ATTENDANCE BE REPORTED TO THE COURT?**

**YES.** Session facilitators will have a participation sheet and return it to designated Supervised Release provider after each class. The Supervised Release providers will, in turn, report attendance to the court. Clients will only be reported as noncompliant if the judge explicitly ordered attendance in the first place. Even when attendance is judicially ordered, the Supervised Release case manager has discretion to reschedule the class without submitting a report of noncompliance if the client did not appear on the first scheduled date. When clients do attend, an expectation of the Tactics and Choices model is that they will each contribute at least once to interactive discussions; but this is not a hard requirement or basis for formal noncompliance.

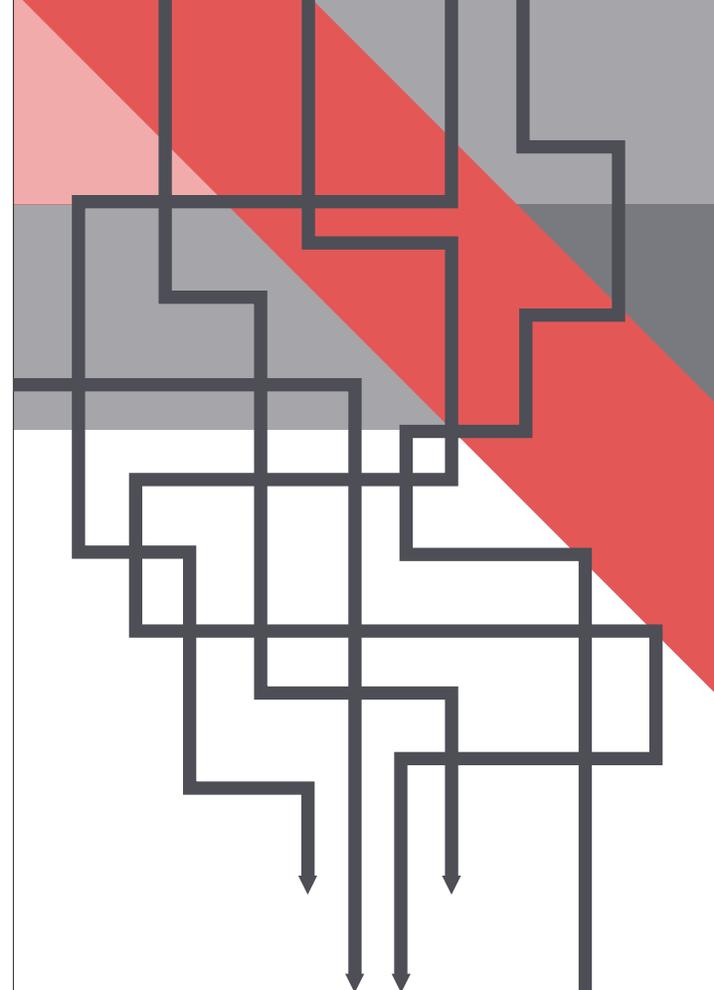
**WHERE ARE THE CLASSES HELD?**

Classes will be held at the Supervised Release offices in each borough. Classes will be offered in the evening and on weekends.

**IF I HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CLASS FOR MY CLIENT, WHO CAN I CONTACT?**

For questions about Tactics and Choices policies and procedures, contact [tacticsandchoices@courtinnovation.org](mailto:tacticsandchoices@courtinnovation.org).

For questions about the attendance or status of a specific client, contact the Supervised Release Program in your borough.



**TACTICS  
AND  
CHOICES**

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**Tactics and Choices is a free, one-time three-hour class for defendants who were arraigned on intimate partner violence (IPV)-related offenses in New York City and placed in the Supervised Release Program. The class was originally created by Men Stopping Violence, a nationally recognized agency dedicated to the prevention of gender-based violence and based in Decatur, Georgia.**

#### **WHO RUNS TACTICS AND CHOICES?**

Tactics and Choices is funded by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice and administered by the Center for Court Innovation, which oversees the training and everyday work of the session facilitators, who have been hired to provide the class. Partners also include CASES and the New York City Criminal Justice Agency.

#### **WHAT HAPPENS IN TACTICS AND CHOICES?**

The three-hour class includes:

1. An interactive exercise using a video clip and discussion of the Power and Control Wheel.
2. A role-play in which participants discuss nonviolent behavioral options in a hypothetical conflict scenario.
3. An Arc of Choice exercise designed to show participants how their thoughts can precipitate violent choices.

#### **IS TACTICS AND CHOICES ONLY FOR CIS MALE CLIENTS? WHAT ABOUT WOMEN OR LGBTQ+ CLIENTS FACING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE ALLEGATIONS?**

There are three Tactics and Choices curricula, respectively for cis male clients, cis female clients, and LGBTQ+ clients. The curriculum for male clients was originally developed by Men Stopping Violence. The women's adaptation was created by the Center for Court Innovation.

The LGBTQ+ adaptation was created by the New York City Anti-Violence Project. Clients can choose which class to attend based on their identity. Interpreters can be available, and the class will be regularly offered in Spanish.

#### **HOW ARE PEOPLE ORDERED TO ATTEND?**

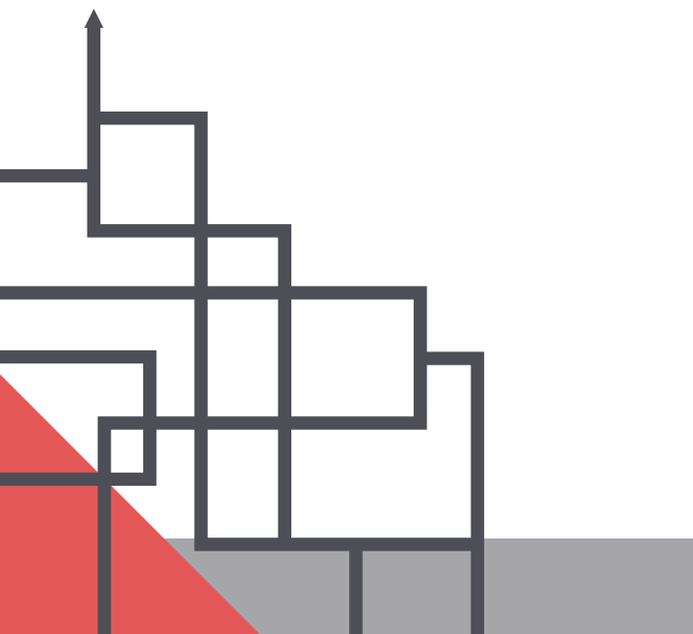
The judge must explicitly order attendance at Tactics and Choices for it to be required. The Supervised Release Program will not mandate a client to attend Tactics and Choices except in conjunction with a judicial order. The judge may either order attendance at arraignment or at a later stage of the pretrial period, as a response to program noncompliance.

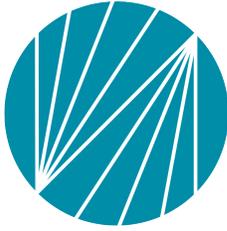
#### **CAN THE JUDGE ORDER TACTICS AND CHOICES FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT ENROLLED IN SUPERVISED RELEASE?**

**NO.** Tactics and Choices is intended for clients of the Supervised Release Program only. The class is not for people assigned to ROR or other types of conditions.

#### **CAN THE JUDGE ORDER TACTICS AND CHOICES FOR PEOPLE WHOSE CURRENT CHARGES DO NOT INVOLVE AN UNDERLYING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE ALLEGATION?**

**NO.** Tactics and Choices is only for people facing IPV allegations on the current case.





New York City Alliance  
Against Sexual Assault

32 Broadway • Ste. 1101  
New York, NY 10004  
t: 212.229.0345 • f: 212.229.0676

## Testimony

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the fundamental inequities in many areas of society, and survivors of sexual and domestic violence have been acutely impacted. While the full scope of the secondary and tertiary impacts of COVID-19 are unknown as of yet, we know the impacts to the mental and physical health of survivors have been enormous, and we expect that we are currently and will continue to see a dramatic uptick in unreported incidences of violence. Early studies suggest upticks of upwards of 25%, and in some instances, cases have doubled.<sup>1</sup> Further, UNFPA data suggests that COVID-19 will undermine the work to end gender-based violence, reducing progress towards global benchmarks by one third.<sup>2</sup>

The New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault (the Alliance) provides free counseling, information, advocacy, and legal services to survivors of sexual assault city-wide. Eighty percent of our clients are low-income or unemployed. As such, most of our clients have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19, and for many of the individuals we work with, technology access is not a given. This is not unique to the Alliance, the World Health Organization,<sup>3</sup> CDC,<sup>4</sup> and supporting research<sup>5</sup> all cite poverty, lack of employment opportunities, lack of institutional support and diminished access to resources as critical factors that increase vulnerability to sexual and domestic violence.

Our counselors are noting the difficulties clients are experiencing trying to cope with their own trauma from sexual assault while managing the circumstances of the COVID-19 crisis. With stay-at-home orders in place, it is particularly difficult for survivors who may not have disclosed their abuse history to family members or partners to have open conversations during remote sessions. In addition, some survivors are in forced contact with their abusers. Not having a safe space to describe their emotional and physical safety needs results in heightened demands on our clinical staff. We have also seen an uptick in other forms of trauma among clientele and barriers to access to services for the most vulnerable. These include heightened racial discrimination towards members of the East Asian community, income and housing insecurity or loss cutting off the most vulnerable members of our community, and conditions of isolation and elevated stress levels triggering symptoms of PTSD experienced by many survivors of sexual violence. Our clients have reported feeling unsafe, isolated, and unmotivated. Many clients are experiencing increased anxiety, depression, grief, and substance abuse triggers.

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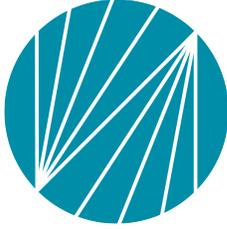
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1406>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID-19\\_impact\\_brief\\_for\\_UNFPA\\_24\\_April\\_2020\\_1.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID-19_impact_brief_for_UNFPA_24_April_2020_1.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/42495/9241545615\\_eng.pdf?sequence=1](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/42495/9241545615_eng.pdf?sequence=1)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/riskprotectivefactors.html>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.pcar.org/sites/default/files/pages-pdf/poverty\\_and\\_sexual\\_violence.pdf](http://www.pcar.org/sites/default/files/pages-pdf/poverty_and_sexual_violence.pdf)



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Many clients have also been acutely impacted by the economic crisis and nearly 50% of our current clients have lost or are at risk of losing their jobs.

In response to COVID-19, the Alliance has adapted our resources and programming to support newly emerging survivor needs. As a citywide referral hub and clearinghouse in the sexual assault field, the Alliance has augmented and coordinated existing services and collaboration between our 465 partners in the medical, legal, law enforcement and social service fields since its inception in 2000. In addition, we disseminate information city-wide. Our website [svfreenyc.org](http://svfreenyc.org) contains the most comprehensive information for sexual assault victim services in New York City. Through our website, social media and email listserv, we are regularly posting and up-dating a COVID 19 resource list to reflect changing conditions in service locations, availability, and safety in real time. We are continuing to provide crisis counseling, system advocacy, legal services remotely with assistance from chat functions. Our Helpline can be reached at (212) 514-7233 or [survivorsupport@svfreenyc.org](mailto:survivorsupport@svfreenyc.org).

Additionally, we are adjusting existing programming to providing online prevention courses and individual support to young people who are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, including college students and young adults aged 13-21 from systemically disenfranchised communities. We continue to offer training and technical assistance to support first responders, including medical professionals who continue to conduct forensic exams during this crisis, as the urgency of forensic examinations remains. Furthermore, we are now able to provide further support to our partners and frontline workers who are working directly with COVID-19 patients. If you are having difficulty coping with stressors of helping those with COVID 19 or are feeling overwhelmed, please call or text (646) 946-0210 during 9am to 12pm on Mondays or 2pm to 5pm on Wednesdays.\* We are staffed by licensed mental health who will gladly assist in providing emotional support and help provide additional resources.

As this crisis forces us to confront the systemic barriers to basic rights and resources faced by so many New Yorkers, it is imperative that we work to replicate in-person services through digital platforms as best as possible. Further, in order to both respond to and prevent the devastating outcomes of COVID-19 for survivors, we need to build our infrastructure now and strive to go further to protect the most vulnerable. COVID-19 also creates unique risks for non-profits, and like many of our partners and allies across the globe, our funding, including council funding, has been compromised by this pandemic. Our ability to respond and ensure that we are able to continue providing services at no cost, continue to support survivors and the first responders who are the consummate heroes in every public health crisis, from this pandemic to the sexual violence epidemic, will depend on increased public support.



**DOVE PROGRAM**  
27-40 Hoyt Avenue South  
Astoria, NY 11102  
Tel: (718) 396-5041

Friday, April 28, 2020

Honorable Helen Rosenthal  
Council Member  
New York City Hall  
City Hall Park  
New York, NY 10007

Submitted by e-mail

**RE: HANAC Testifying Funding Support Letter**

Dear Council Member Rosenthal:

We are writing to you to support funding for domestic violence survivors in NYC. The COVID-19 outbreak has a significant impact on New York City residents' lives affecting mental health and security for all of us, specifically for victims of domestic violence. The media just reported a case of a 78-year-old woman who survived this virus and was found dead in her Queens home last Friday, on April 24, 2020. According to El Dario, the elderly victim was found in the morning with stab wounds and the victim's son was charged with her murder. Cases like this one could have been prevented with the appropriate intervention. More importantly, this a clear example that underserved communities need mental health support, and in many of these cases, the response from law enforcement is required to prevent catastrophes that sadly end in death for the victims.

The NYC Council discretionary funding is expected to reduce budgets in some of the city programs to prioritize the emergency needs for hospitals and other emergencies resulting from this pandemic. Thus, we understand that funds are limited, and at this time most of the funds are allocated to address those issues that are considered a priority. However, it is clearly evident that during this unprecedented time, it is crucial to provide families with support for mental health services and direct services support from community organizations like HANAC, Inc.



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During this pandemic, we have not stopped providing essential services to our underserved communities. Clearly, we need additional resources in order to adequately address the rise of domestic violence cases and mental health services and the need to provide family law support during this crisis. With the collaboration of local community members and La Bonita Mx Radio, we were able to create a community online radio that can be accessed with any smartphone device. While we are aware that some members of our community do not have access to the internet, the recording of the live stream podcasts are sent as a text message for individuals who do not have access to the internet or social media.

We strongly believe that we can partner or collaborate with many organizations to make this initiative even stronger. In order to continue this social media extension and partnership to fruition, funding is needed. The following is criteria we developed for our online radio model; this is an alternative to services in the FY 2021.

- Offering information for health, mental health, and domestic violence intervention for emergency shelters intake process, counseling, law enforcement, and local social services.
- Providing information for medical or mental referrals for unattended communities, primarily underserved communities of color who are the most affected in this pandemic.
- Attend to emergency cases and support to Survivors of Domestic Violence.
- Provide live streaming information for seniors, including financial abuse and scam prevention.
- Aid to undocumented, vulnerable, and individuals that have no access to health due to health insurance requirements.
- Prevent fraud in immigration, educate the community about civil rights, and promote the city resources for emerging situations like the pandemic and domestic violence events.



DOVE PROGRAM  
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- Inviting experts in mental health to discuss abusive patterns of behavior. In some cases, abusive behavior is part of the community, and the cultural background that some victims may not realize that family dynamics are not appropriate at home, or they are afraid to request supportive services.

We want to keep providing information to clients in need of social services that currently live in the NYC area. Our community and programs need the money for domestic violence prevention and intervention, which will help to extend the great work that we provide through DOVE City programs.

We thank you for your time and consideration to this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you should need any additional information that may support this request.

Respectfully submitted,

Enrique Jerves,  
DOVE Program Director



# HANAC

**SERVING THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY SINCE 1972**

# DOVE



HANAC's Victim Assistance Program has been in operation for over 30 years providing a safe and secure haven for a wide array of victims. The program has provided essential support for the underserved victims of civil and criminal crimes all over the city, including but not limited to legal representation, immigration relief, family petitions, counseling, referrals and many other forms of relief for the victims. We are proud to state that all of the people that we serve in our program are guaranteed a confidential, non-judgmental and supportive environment. All of the staff members are well-trained and ensure that they will provide a secure, professional, effective assistance to provide the proper remedies for crime victims, such as compensation claims, legal remedies, direct referrals to reputable organizations and client advocacy in accessing the resources to meet their needs.

Becoming a victim of a crime is very traumatic and come with serious legal consequences that most people are not prepared to handle. Some of these consequences include, but are not limited to issues such as family, housing, employment, immigration issues, criminal or may include financial difficulties. These issues contain many nuances and complexities, and the fact that they often all arise from one event; they become daunting and overwhelming.

Our staff members are trained to effectively assess the severity of the situation and our legal team can readily identify the specialized assistance that is required to handle the situation.

As a result of the Covid-19 outbreak, we began to provide Legal Victim and Domestic Supportive services by livestreaming online from radio podcasts. These podcasts were designed with the objective and goals to provide a competent and comprehensive information for victims of domestic violence survivors, sexual assault victims and other crime victims. The podcasts also serve to minimize the enormous gaps in access to housing, mental health, translation services, legal referrals, and any other additional social services. Our podcasts attempts to inform our clients about our Criminal Jurisdiction system, that include the power of courts to hear a case brought by a state accusing the defendant of a crime. Also, the podcast will discuss Civil Court Process, which comprises Family Courts, Housing, and the civil court judicial system.

Within the scope of the information and referral objective, followers will be informed about the legal enforcement system and how to have access to different agencies. Therefore, these set of podcast plays a source of information for education in which followers get resources for social services alternatives that tend to protect the victims' rights to privacy, to oversee his/her right to protection, and eventually to set up the time to consult with the program attorney or to be referred to any other program depending on the follower needs.

**Furthermore, as a part of our information objective, we will also inform about the following programming resources:**

- HANAC Legal Victim Services/ DOVE Program/ What it is/ How it works.
- Support for Domestic Violence, Crime Victims and Covid-19 affected community members.
- OVS restitution explanation; eligibility and process to apply.
- U-Visas, VAWA Visas, and T- Visas, information with no legal advice content.
- Domestic Violence intervention information, regarding police reports, the order of protection, divorce, custody, visitation. Limited to information with no legal advice content.
- Local information with citation of the newspaper regarding victim assistance services, immigration and social welfare updates.
- Media Resources for the community, if they have the interest to learn more for social services in general.
- To have a guest speaker that could explain information for Covid-19 resources for housing, food pantry, immigration, worker rights, unemployment services. Health services for unattended communities, legal aid, welfare, additional direct direct social services to navigate the pandemic the additional needs for New York residents facing the consequences of the pandemic.

Please find below some samples of how services are being delivered and the live stream channels used for the online radio:

# 1. HANAC Radio Link

<http://www.labonitamx.com/hanacradio/?fbclid=IwAR3V6UsyhMGBPxHa51wozEQ1YFb3UfkNfPtlWisXizQsnbElrODoECifmw>

Not Secure | labonitamx.com/hanacradio/?fbclid=IwAR3V6UsyhMGBPxHa51wozEQ1YFb3UfkNfPtlWisXizQsnbElrODoECifmw

HANAC RADIO PODCAST NEW EPISODES CONTACT

**HANAC**  
SERVING THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY SINCE 1972

**HANAC**  
Health Access Informative Workshop for Non-eligible Applicants

- Local Social Services Information
- Medicaid, Medicare and Health Insurance Information
- Affordable Health Care Centers
- Health Care Network

February 10, 2020  
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM  
4400 Commercial Center  
4400 Commercial Center, San Diego

HANAC RADIO PODCAST

Census 2020

## 2. La Bonita MX

<http://www.laBonitaMX.com/>



### 3. Podcast samples:

# HANAC | DOVE

Radio Podcast



**The HANAC DOVE Program provides the following free services.**

If you or someone you know has been a victim of a crime, help may be available.

- Information about the criminal justice process.
- Information about victim rights. How to obtain notifications, etc.
- Immigration assistance (Special Visas, follow up applications).
- Criminal Advocacy /Accompaniment.
- Referral to other Victim Assistance programs.

Speaker: **Sharon Walters** - HANAC DOVE  
Sharon will provide information about different alternatives for the program services.

**Links:**  
<http://myradiostream.com/s23/18244>  
<http://www.labonitamx.com/>



# HANAC | DOVE

Radio Podcast



**The HANAC DOVE Program provides the following free services.**

If you or someone you know has been a victim of a crime, help may be available.

- Information about the criminal justice process.
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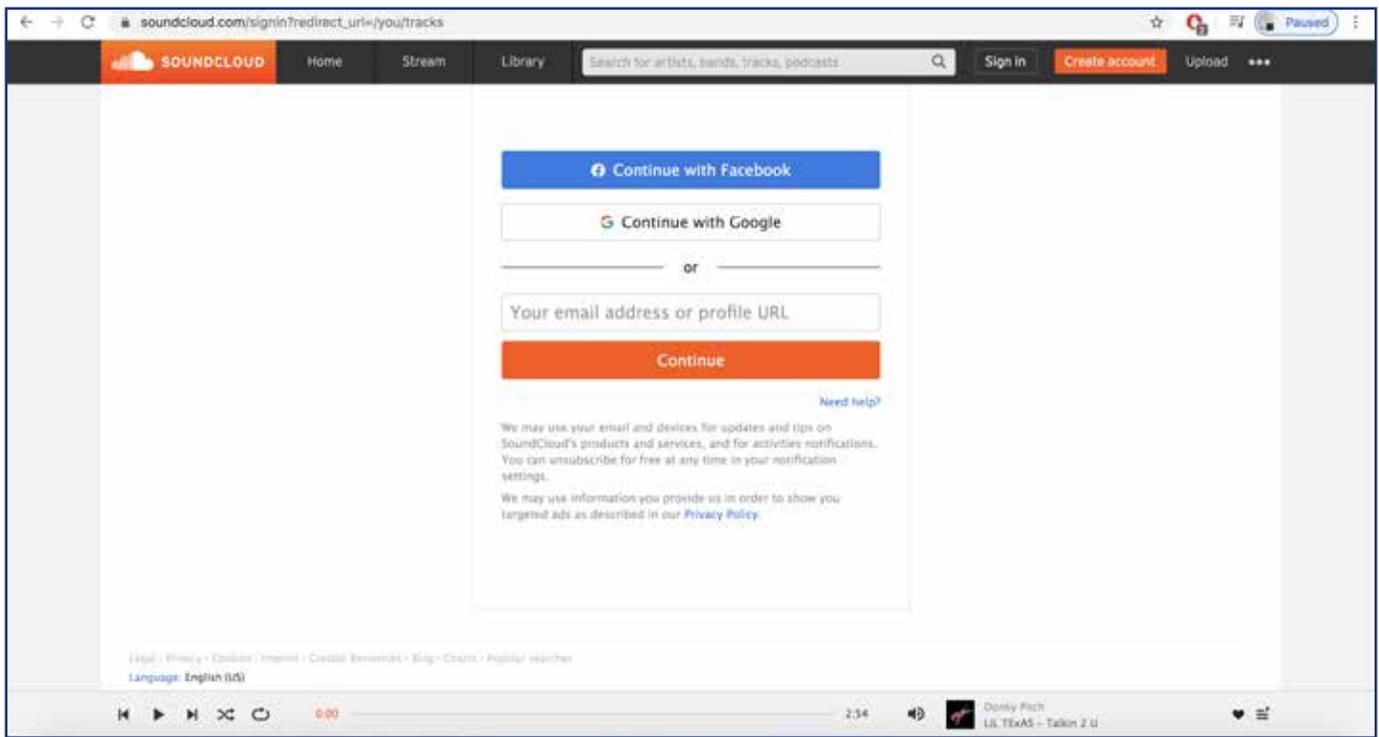
Guest Speaker:  
**Roberto Bolanos** HANAC - Paralegal

**Links:**  
<http://myradiostream.com/s23/18244>  
<http://www.labonitamx.com/>

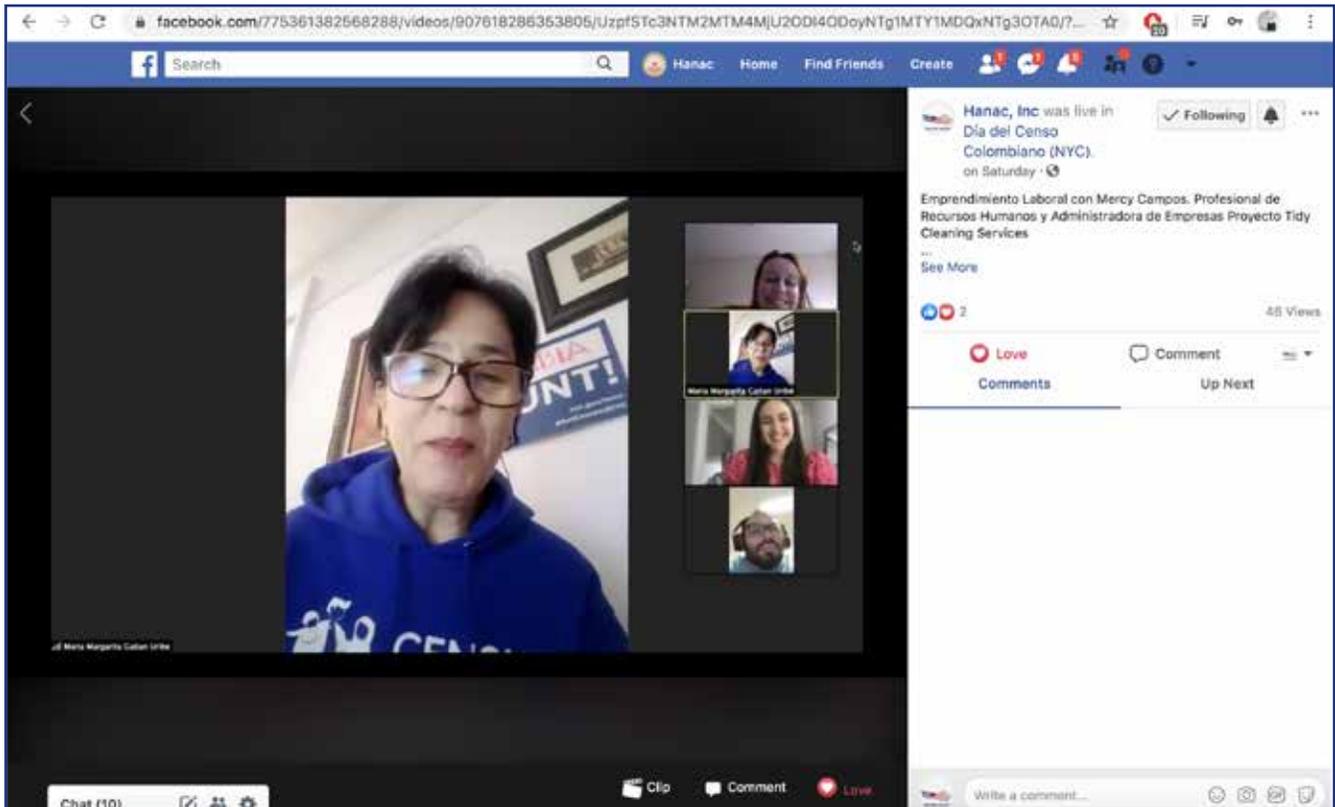
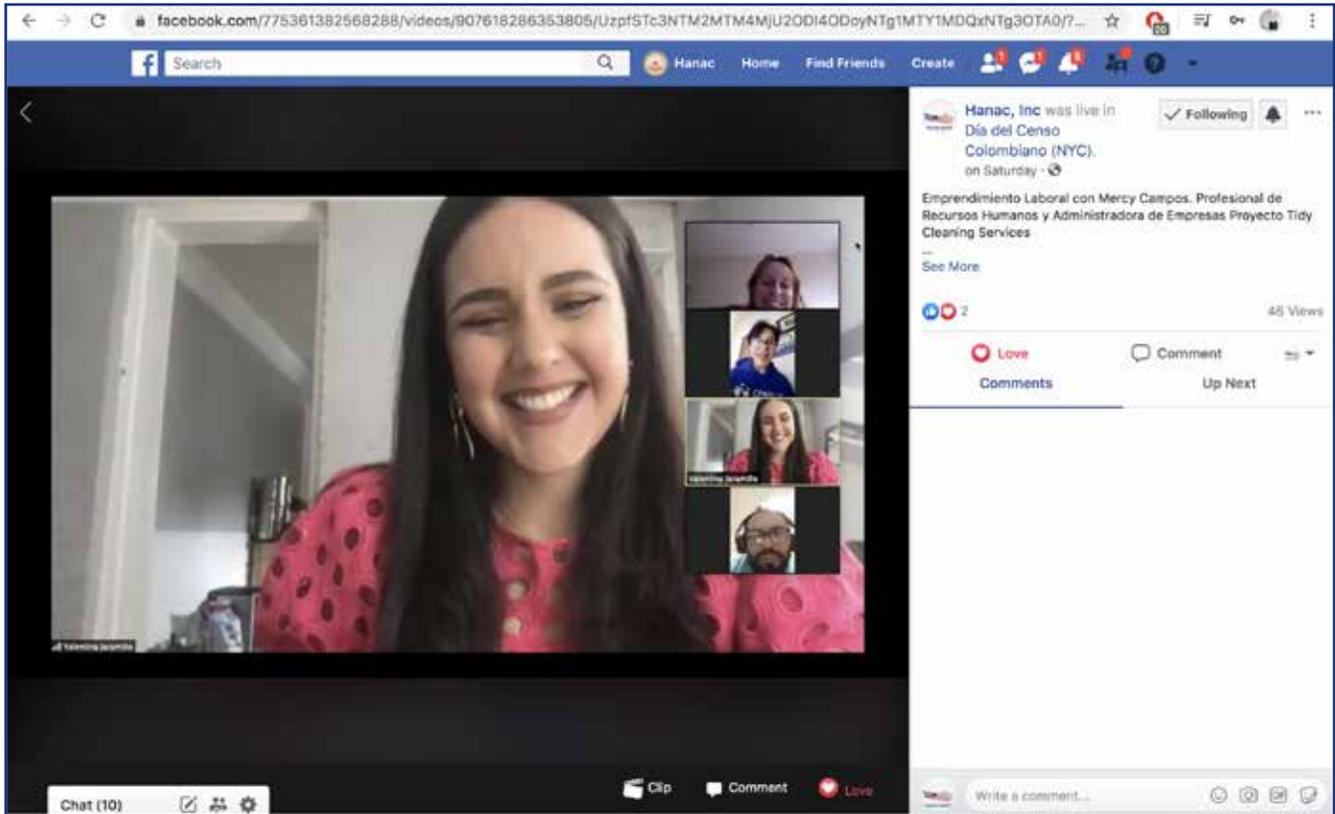


## 4. Sound cloud Podcast

<https://soundcloud.com/you/tracks>



# 5. Facebook live samples:



# Facebook live samples:

A screenshot of a Facebook Live video. The main video shows a man with a beard and mustache, wearing a dark jacket, speaking. Behind him is a large Colombian flag. In the top right corner of the video, there is a small inset showing a grid of other participants. The Facebook interface is visible on the right side, showing the video title "Día del Censo Colombiano", the publisher "Hanac, Inc", and engagement metrics like "52 Views".

facebook.com/775361382568288/videos/617966078799256/Uzpf5Tc3NTM2MTM4MjU2ODI4ODoyNTg1MTkxNTUxNTg1MjUz/?ei...

Search Hanac Home Find Friends Create

Día del Censo Colombiano

Hanac, Inc was live in Día del Censo Colombiano (NYC) on Saturday · 🌐

Tienen preguntas o inquietudes sobre inmigración? See More

52 Views

Like Comment Up Next

Most Relevant +

View all 9 comments

Write a comment...

A screenshot of a Facebook Live video. The main video shows a woman wearing blue medical scrubs and a blue hairnet, speaking. The background is a plain wall. In the top right corner of the video, there is a small inset showing a grid of other participants. The Facebook interface is visible on the right side, showing the video title "Día del Censo Colombiano", the publisher "Hanac, Inc", and engagement metrics like "103 Views".

facebook.com/775361382568288/videos/1596711637152695/Uzpf5Tc3NTM2MTM4MjU2ODI4ODoyNTg0OTE2MTE4Mjc5NDYz/?...

Search Hanac Home Find Friends Create

Día del Censo Colombiano

Hanac, Inc was live in Día del Censo Colombiano (NYC) on Saturday · 🌐

Homenaje a quienes sirven a los trabajadores de la salud See More

103 Views

Like Comment Up Next

Most Relevant +

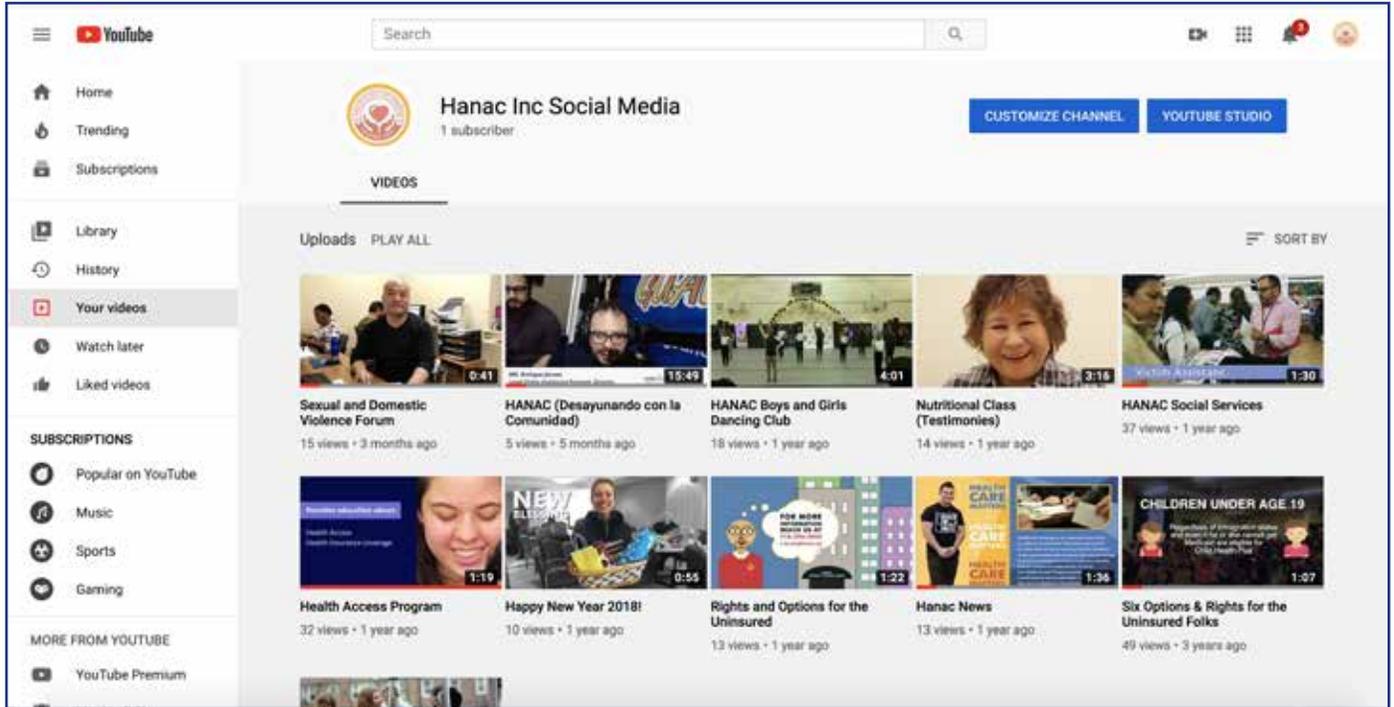
# Facebook live samples:

This screenshot shows a Facebook Live broadcast from the page 'Dia del Censo Ecuatoriano'. The main video features a man with glasses and a beard speaking. To his right, a vertical column of smaller video thumbnails shows other participants: 'Mercy Campos', 'Rocio Camacho', 'Roberto Salazar', and 'Irene Nizaga'. The Facebook interface on the right includes the page name, a 'Following' button, and a post with text in Spanish: '¿Has llenado el censo? Si no ingrese en línea en my2020census.gov o llame a nuestro número gratuito 844-330-2020.' Below the post are interaction options like 'Like', 'Comment', and 'Up Next', along with a 'Most Relevant' comment section.

This screenshot shows another Facebook Live broadcast from the same page, 'Dia del Censo Ecuatoriano'. The main video features a woman with glasses and a black top speaking. A vertical column of smaller video thumbnails shows other participants: 'Mercy Campos', a woman with glasses, a man, and 'Marcela Rios'. The Facebook interface on the right includes the page name, a 'Following' button, and a post with text in Spanish: '¿Has llenado el censo? Si no ingrese en línea en my2020census.gov o llame a nuestro número gratuito 844-330-2020.' Below the post are interaction options like 'Like', 'Comment', and 'Up Next', along with a 'Most Relevant' comment section that includes a link to 'Census 2020'.

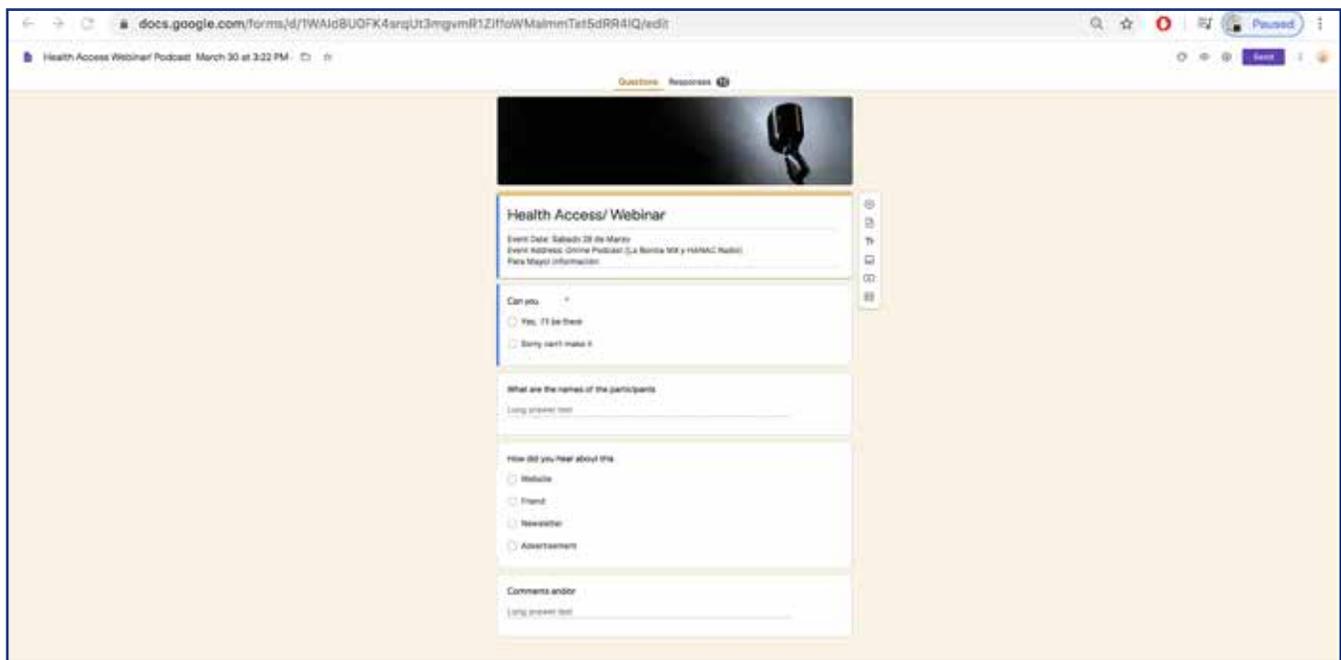
# 6. YouTube Samples:

[https://www.youtube.com/feed/my\\_videos](https://www.youtube.com/feed/my_videos)



## 7. Registration form to keep crack of services.

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1WAId8U0FK4srqUt3mgvmR1ZiffoWMalmmTet5dRR4lQ/edit>



The image shows a screenshot of a Google Forms registration page. The browser's address bar displays the URL: [docs.google.com/forms/d/1WAId8U0FK4srqUt3mgvmR1ZiffoWMalmmTet5dRR4lQ/edit](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1WAId8U0FK4srqUt3mgvmR1ZiffoWMalmmTet5dRR4lQ/edit). The form title is "Health Access/ Webinar". Below the title, there is a header image of a microphone. The form contains the following sections:

- Event Date:** Sábado 28 de Marzo
- Event Address:** Online Platform (La Banca MX y HANAC Hub) Para Mayor información
- Can you:**
  - Yes, I'll be there
  - Sorry can't make it
- What are the names of the participants:**  
Long answer text
- How did you hear about this:**
  - Website
  - Friend
  - Newsletter
  - Advertisement
- Comments and/or:**  
Long answer text

## Contact Office Information



2740 Hoyt Ave S, Astoria, NY 11102



718-396-5041 or (5042)



**N** N train (Astoria Blvd Station)



Domestic  
Violence  
Project

*Testimony to NYC Council on The Impact of COVID on Domestic Violence Victims  
Madeline Garcia Bigelow, Esq. Associate Director, UJC | Founder and Managing Director, DVP  
mbigelow@urbanjustice.org*

Honorable Members of the Committee on Women and Gender Equity & the Committee on Public Safety:

Thank you for taking the time away from your loved ones to consider the impact of COVID on survivors of intimate partner violence and the critical importance of continuing access to on the ground, community-based services.

Our mission at the Domestic Violence Project of the Urban Justice Center (“DVP”) is to help survivors of domestic violence/intimate partner abuse (“DV/IPV”) and their children live free from violence and abuse. DVP recognizes intimate partner violence to be a human rights violation experienced in any type of intimate relationship, regardless of gender, sexual identity, immigration or other status.

Founded in 2003, DVP is among the first projects in New York City to focus on using a collaborative legal, social work advocacy model driven by the survivors in order to empower individuals to thrive post abuse. DVP is a project of the Urban Justice Center, a social justice nonprofit organization based in New York City. The Urban Justice Center is the home to six social justice projects that operate independently, but share the agency's infrastructure, as well as a common commitment to finding innovative solutions to the problems of poor and vulnerable people.

A survivor’s road to safety does not always lead to the criminal justice system (e.g. NYPD, Prosecution) or even to the Family Justice Centers. In fact, quite often a survivor does not want to engage with the criminal system and seeks instead for alternative ways by which to address their abuse. A survivor’s journey includes gathering of information from safe and confidential sources; seeking support within their community; building trust with community-based providers; and feeling respected, validated, and humanized throughout any process. On any given day, our work with and on behalf of survivors requires an expertise in legal and social services programs with a constant juggling of changed priorities and needs. However, during moments of societal crisis (COVID, 9/11, Sandy), the most critical component of our work stems from programmatic nimbleness and immediate

pivoting to provide varied means by which to access to these very services. During moments of societal crisis, victims are unable to seek services through the usual channels.

In 2006, the DoVE Initiative was created as a direct response to the needs of our most marginalized, underserved communities experiencing DV/IPV. DoVE was the response to a call for services intended to address DV/IPV at the community level. DoVE was, and continues to be, an investment and commitment to alternative and lifesaving services outside the criminal justice system. Over the past 14 years, the DoVE Initiative has proven to be a staggering success. Countless victims have been led to safety; received counseling; engaged in long term advocacy; and, empowered to navigate complex city, state and federal systems. These survivors have experienced the care, the commitment and the high-touch focus often reserved for the more privileged among us. The Council's unfailing commitment to DoVE, underscores its understanding of the essential need for alternative services for all and particularly for those who do not see law enforcement and the criminal system as a truly viable option. For many of our clients, particularly those from immigrant communities, communities of color, LGBTQ, etc., the criminal justice system falls short as the best route to safety. Without DoVE funding, these victims will not have a viable path to safety.

### **Simply stated, DoVE funding saves lives.**

Our work at DVP, along with the collective work of all DoVE funded CBOs, requires us to be in the community and on the front lines. We are on the front lines fighting on behalf of victims' safety and equity; we are on the frontlines fighting to protect essential and expected legal rights; we are on the frontlines demanding the right mental health services; we are on the frontlines engaging in extensive advocacy with any and all intersecting systems to ensure equity; we are on the frontlines fighting for financial empowerment; we are on the frontlines fighting housing and food security. We are on the frontlines fighting for the human rights of each and every victim served. DoVE funding supports our frontline fight for equity for each survivor.

COVID has unveiled the breadth of inequities experienced throughout NYC and the nation. Disproportionate numbers of our brothers and sisters from these very communities are dying. DoVE money is often the only city funded program that allows and encourages the very nimbleness and pivoting required to provide access to truly life altering and often life-saving services.

## Why Our Services are Essential

Our team is comprised of a passionate group of attorneys and advocates, working together to provide survivors with holistic services that include both legal and non-legal needs. Our services are essential because we are providing direct services to a vulnerable population in NYC to ensure they have access to justice systems, safety, housing, benefits and their children. Our clients are mothers, fathers, sons and daughters.

Our team is small but fierce, comprised of 25 incredible staff working across the five boroughs of NYC to voice the concerns of our survivors. In FY19, we handled over 3,000 legal and advocacy cases, held 302 outreach events; provided 1,2000 survivors with safety assessments; offered 266 legal clinics; opened 476 new advocacy cases, provided legal assistance on 576 new family law matters, screened 376 immigrants for relief, and provided 32 survivors with intensive long-term therapy.

On an average month, our program initiates 120 new cases for 146 new survivors. ***Since the lockdown on March 16, 2020 to April 29, 2020, we have opened 155 new cases for 115 new survivors.*** Data shows that our demand has been higher than average even with a lockdown and our offices physically closed. Imagine what the demand will be when we return.

Our institutional stakeholders include the NYC Courts, Mayor's Office to End Gender Based Violence, NYC Family Justice Centers, NYPD, District Attorneys' Offices and one of our strongest partners, the NYC Council. We also rely on our collaborative efforts with other community-based organizations, through coalitions and working groups to partnerships where we provide cross referrals, clinics and technical assistance. Defending and advocating for the rights of survivors from the ground up, we are the voice for our clients and your constituents.

## A Dark Future for DV Survivors

COVID-19 is an abuser's best friend. The United Nations has [cited](#) a rise in domestic violence, calling on governments to address DV. Isolation is legitimized, opportunities for abuse and monitoring ripe, and options for survivors largely absent. For those living with their abusers, simply reaching out for help can cost them their life. Calling their lawyer or counselor is virtually impossible. Many choose to endure the blows by their partner versus risking exposure to COVID-19 in seeking help. For those who have escaped but share children with their abusers, co-parenting is another means for the abuser to control, manipulate and torture survivors. When your home is dangerous, shelter in place is a nightmare.

With the NYC Courts largely closed and operating virtually for emergency cases only, survivors find themselves largely without recourse. Fueled by this reality, abusers are violating court orders and failing to return children to survivors who are the custodial parents. Some are intentionally failing to social distance the children while others are threatening to infect vulnerable survivors with the virus. We have heard stories of incidents of violence increasing in frequency and severity. Our clients are working poor families who are suddenly unable to pay their rent, put food on the table for the families or buy basic needs like diapers and cleaning supplies. During any type of crisis, they are of most hard hit. During this shelter-in-place lockdown, they are in dire straits. With the normal points of entry closed, it's simply unsafe for them to reach out. NYPD is not the safest option for many of our clients. Survivors may have a distrust for law enforcement given their past experiences, they may fear retribution by their abusers for calling, or they simply may not want police involved. There is no universal definition of "justice" for survivors. At DVP, we provide survivors the tools and information they need to guide their choices. Civil legal services for survivors are often the only method for seeking justice. Without us, the word cannot get out that help is there. We are their allies, rooted in their communities serving as their advocates and their voice. We are unequivocally essential now more than ever.

## **Our COVID-19 Response**

Our team is providing “virtual” legal clinics and are on-call taking referrals from the NYC Family Justice Centers, our intake-line and general email, City Council Members, as well as other community-based organizations. To date, our numbers have not dipped, and we have maintained a steady stream of inquiries. With offices closed, we know that there are more survivors that we are not reaching and are preparing for an onslaught of inquiries when we return.

- **Advocacy**

Advocates are providing safety assessments; creating individualized safety plans for survivors; assisting with housing concerns; and addressing real time needs. Our team is educating survivors on current COVID-19 related benefits, referrals for additional services and much needed crisis counseling. Working creatively to assist survivors who may not be eligible for any benefits and are in need of food or other essential needs, DVP sends gift cards to survivors by mail so that they can buy the food and basic goods they need to survive. Our advocates also support survivors by coming up with individualized plans for economic survival as well as psychological and physical safety.

- **Legal assistance**

DVP attorneys speak with survivors daily, providing legal screenings and consultations as well as safety assessments. In the past five weeks, we have “appeared” in court virtually, filing for orders of protection for 7 new survivors. Our lawyers have successfully negotiated temporary and safe arrangements between survivors and abusive partners through their attorneys to ensure that visitation is adhered to and to secure custody of the children. Our immigration team has worked incredibly hard to file immigration applications from home, often racing against the clock to meet filing deadlines. The team is providing new survivors with immigration screenings and consultations by phone, answering questions about eligibility for benefits based on immigration status and serving as a reliable source of legal information for the immigrant community.

- **Virtual Outreach**

In order to reach survivors at home, we are employing creative techniques to get the word out that we are here. DVP is creating a series of pre-recorded “know your rights” videos on safety, orders of protection, custody/visitation, uncontested divorce, child/spousal support and FAQs in immigration law. Distributing facts and resources via social media and our website, DVP hopes to provide safe ways to reach survivors. We have partnered with City

Council members who have tweeted about our services, offered to include them in their newsletters and be a direct resource for city council district staff. Our newest strategy is survivor-led, calling upon the strengths of a few survivors who are active in their community to spread awareness to their friends, families, local businesses and places of worship.

### **City Council Support for DV Survivors**

Close partners with the Council since 2006, your support for our program comes in the form of discretionary funding by individual Council Members, the DOVE Initiative as well as other initiatives like IOI (Immigrant Opportunities Initiative). Most notable to our program's success has been the generous and flexible support of DOVE. It not only allows us general operating support to fund our program efficiently, but it also allows us to give direct assistance to survivors (i.e., food, items such as diapers, toiletries, metro-cards, legal filing fees, etc.). It allows us to pay for needed services like language line, so that we can serve all survivors regardless of their background.

DVP calls for the council to not only support the reimbursement of awards in FY20 but also for continued funding in FY21. We are preparing for the uptick in inquiries, chaos of court resuming and the increased economic and psychological stress now. Without funding, our program will be unable to meet the needs of our community with the focus, attention and depth needed for long term success post-abuse. We are acting quickly in developing responses and creating programmatic infrastructure to address the expected increased demand of services. We are grateful for your partnership and collaboration in the provision of equitable services to all survivors of domestic violence in NYC.

**Testimony of Briana Barocas and Linda G. Mills before the New York City Council  
Committee on Women and Gender Equality and Committee on Public Safety, regarding the impact of  
Coronavirus (COVID-19) on domestic violence in New York City**

**May 1, 2020**

It is an honor to submit this online testimony regarding the impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on domestic violence (DV) in New York City (NYC). Our names are Dr. Briana Barocas and Dr. Linda G. Mills from New York University's Center on Violence and Recovery, a research center affiliated with the Silver School of Social Work. For the past 15 years, we have worked together on researching effective treatment programs for people who commit DV crimes with a focus on reducing violence and enhancing victim safety. We have collaborated with judges, social service agencies and justice centers, victim advocates, and community members in various parts of the United States to implement and study a restorative justice approach to addressing DV crimes. Our research has been funded by the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Justice, among others.

Since the shelter-in-place order was issued for NYC there has been increased awareness of the risk of DV. The safety of victims of domestic abuse is paramount during the pandemic and a holistic response is needed both now and in the future. There is a need for awareness campaigns beyond just victims and should include perpetrators. We need DV response efforts geared towards both victims and perpetrators. Furthermore, NYC needs to be thinking about preparing now for when the shelter-in-place order is lifted. Ongoing stressors related to the pandemic such as the economic impact will continue after the order has been lifted. Additionally, there may be an increase in relationship separations, and this is a known period of increased risk for serious DV incidents and homicides. These realities need to be considered in terms of interventions moving forward.

NYC needs public awareness campaigns aimed at both victims and perpetrators. The NYC HOPE initiative connects those experiencing dating, domestic, or gender-based violence to much needed resources. Yet initiatives geared towards perpetrators appear to be lacking. A campaign is needed to highlight what domestic violence is, that there is no excuse for domestic violence, and that despite COVID-19, the law is still applicable. Additionally, it is important to emphasize that getting help demonstrates strength and that caring for each other as a family peacefully is a goal we can achieve by encouraging people to seek help to stop the cycle of violence.

Finally, we believe that a range of services are necessary to meet the needs of both victims and perpetrators that address the array of DV cases (including same sex intimate partner violence and family violence between an adult child and parent). These services should include restorative justice approaches that allow victims and perpetrators to come together peacefully to address the violence and to heal. Our research has shown that combining restorative justice with other responses to DV such as a batterer intervention program significantly reduces both subsequent arrests and the severity of crimes.

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

**Testimony of The Legal Aid Society**

**City Council Oversight Hearing on Domestic Violence May 1, 2020**

**Submitted to:  
The New York City Council  
Committee on Women and Gender Equity  
Committee on Public Safety  
May 1, 2020**

**Submitted by:  
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The Legal Aid Society Civil Practice Family/DV Unit

Founded in 1876, The Legal Aid Society is the nation's oldest and largest provider of legal services to indigent clients. Annually, Legal Aid Society provides legal assistance in more than 300,000 individual matters for low-income families and individuals with civil, criminal, and juvenile rights legal problems, in all five boroughs of New York City.

The Family/Domestic Violence Unit of The Legal Aid Society's Civil Practice represents hundreds of survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking in both family and supreme court annually. The attorneys of our Unit provide full representation for domestic violence survivors in Supreme Court, in adversarial complex contested divorces, covering all issues for survivors: their right to be free from harm in their own homes with order of protection, their right to custody of their children, to child support and spousal maintenance, to equitable division of property, including their right to continue to occupy their homes and apartments, maintain their leases and other benefits when divorcing from their abusers. In Family Court matters, our attorneys represent survivors in family offense matters -to obtain orders of protection, as well as in custody, visitation and support matters. We are also represent eligible persons to obtain uncontested divorces without needing to appear in court.

City-wide our Family/DV Unit receives telephone intake from the public, referrals from each borough's Family Justice Center, from other legal services agencies, and from our Community Based Partners. In some of our neighborhood offices, we conduct walk-in intake as well.

From March 7, 2020, when The Mayor of the City of New York and the Governor of the State of New York declared a public emergency and thereafter signed the "New York State on

PAUSE” Executive Order, which currently extends until May 15, 2020, we have been living under the restrictions caused by Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis. The Legal Aid Society’s Family/DV Unit has been witnessing drastic changes in the lives of our client population that have affected the ways in which we are able to serve them. Our clients are already vulnerable: preyed upon and unsafe in their own homes, living in fear, with limited, and sometimes no external supports or resources, often financially dependent on their abusers and without self-autonomy or self-determination.

### The Impact of Coronavirus on Providing DV Legal Services

I’m here to speak to you about what we are seeing in this crisis: We are getting more calls, but many are calls for advice. There are calls from people who have been wanting to get divorced, but didn’t have the time to seek out counsel, do the research, have the conversations, because they are normally so busy with work, kids, and overwhelmed with just subsiding. In this PAUSE, they are able to seek out the basic information and consider their options to go forward. There are calls from people who already have orders of support through divorce or family court, who are now in fear of losing the support they are receiving because of job loss, inability to work, contraction of the virus or quarantine of their support provider. They stand to lose their shelter, their ability to care for children. There are calls from people already physically separated with visitation agreements or orders requiring exchange of children at school, at precincts or other public locations. These arrangements can’t be carried out as before, due to the public health restrictions. Parents who can have reasonable communications with each other can come to reasonable temporary arrangements. Those with protective orders in place often cannot

reach alternative arrangements. There are those whose children are not being returned after visitation, situations where a visiting parent is using the public restrictions as an excuse to keep a child longer, sometimes indefinitely. These people are asking what to do. We are responding and calling back everyone who reaches out to us, if only to give what advice we can. Many of these are situations where we cannot provide legal help due to the pandemic crisis. The courts are closed but for emergency matters. We cannot commence divorces now, we cannot handle support issues or make new applications, we cannot deal with custody/visitation disputes because the courts will not take these as new matters now. We are not helping some of the most vulnerable.

We are seeing some of our community based partners change gears. Rather than providing comprehensive services including crisis counseling, trauma care and referrals, they now have to prioritize providing basic needs—food distribution to those in dire need; meeting children’s needs, assisting with benefits and unemployment. Physical needs override the mental health needs and the legal avenues.

We are seeing more direct referrals from other legal services providers for our services. Usually, we see cases referred to us through our intake system. But with many service providers unsure what numbers are working, we are seeing other legal services providers reaching out via our cell phones and emails. We are connecting on a personal level with our colleagues across agencies. Now, more than before, we are getting referrals from other legal service providers for matters we traditionally handle with more frequency than they do, such as support and divorce. We are all feeling the same urgency.

We are also seeing the technology gap. Our client community includes people with multiple family members at home during the crisis, but with limited access to technology. Those without smartphones and internet service are not able to search the web for services, or make the calls –even if just for advice. They are in small quarters, they have no privacy. They may be sharing technology with several family members. When clients reach out to us for legal help for domestic abuse issues, they need to reveal very personal, private, sometimes very traumatizing details of their lives. They cannot do this in a small apartment, with their children or other family members in the same space. They cannot do this with their abuser listening. And they cannot go outside – to a library for internet access; to a family justice center; even to their child’s school to see a trusted face. Lack of technology and lack of privacy when victims or survivors are stuck at home means lack of access to help.

We look to the City, and the City Council to assist us in serving our clients. We need more technology access and services to low income households--better internet, more devices, more free service. In the same way that the remote learning directive of the public schools sought to reach children. Every household should have access to resources through the internet – it is the primary source of information in our society. Similarly, every household should have access to phone communication. Once there were land lines. They were considered a basic necessity for a household. Today, every person should have the right of access to a personal cell phone.

We also look to the City to coordinate the basic resources that are available. And to communicate to the public where those resources can be found. Information on food pantries,

food delivery services, other basic necessities, where people in need can go, should be available. Access and sign up can and should be made available by text messages. These services need to be placed in areas that people frequent, such as grocery stores. Signage needs to be in multiple languages.

Finally, we look to the City Council to help us in advocating and urging the courts – the family court and divorce court -- to open more parts, even remotely, to allow more essential cases to be heard – custody and visitation issues, and child support, are critical to preserving the balance of client households. These are matters that need intervention now, before these families and individuals spiral further into desperation. Also, a process to get the courts to start performing clerical functions that can be performed without fully opening the courts to the public, such as finalizing divorces that are already filed and waiting to be signed, or judgments waiting to be filed in the clerk's office. Clearing such matters will allow our clients who have survived abuse and survived the court system to truly begin the next stage of their lives, with the dignity and autonomy that they have earned.

#### We Are Here to Serve

The Legal Aid Society's Family/DV Unit provides legal services city-wide, to an already vulnerable client base. We are a small group but we are backed by the resources and support of The Legal Aid Society's entire Civil Practice, and our colleagues across the Criminal and Juvenile Rights Practices, as we aspire and fight to achieve the common goal of Justice in Every Borough, for every one of our most vulnerable fellow humans. We are always present, always

available to work with you, our Council Members, to achieve these common goals. We welcome the opportunity to assist in any way.



## New York City Anti-Violence Project

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**TESTIMONY from the New York City Anti-Violence Project (AVP)  
To the  
New York City Council Committee on Women and Gender Equity and Public Safety  
May 1, 2020**

**Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on LGBTQ Communities of Color**

**To:** The Honorable Chairs Helen Rosenthal and Donovan Richards

**From:** Beverly Tillery, Executive Director, New York City Anti-Violence Project (AVP)

**Date:** May 1, 2020

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

Good afternoon, Chair Rosenthal and Chair Richards, my name is Beverly Tillery, and I am the Executive Director of the New York City Anti-Violence Project (AVP). I am grateful to be testifying at this hearing, and that the Council is recognizing that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on intimate partner violence is an issue of utmost importance that must be addressed.

AVP is the only LGBTQ-specific victim services agency in New York City, and the largest organization in the country dedicated exclusively to working with LGBTQ and HIV-affected survivors of all forms of violence, with a special focus on intimate partner violence (IPV), sexual violence (SV), hate violence (HV), hookup/pick-up/dating violence, stalking, and institutional violence. AVP contracts with HRA as the City-Wide provider of non-residential domestic violence services to LGBTQ communities, and we are the only LGBTQ-specific rape crisis center in New York State. We operate a 24/7 hotline that is bilingual in English and Spanish and provide legal and counseling services to our community. All of our services are free and confidential.

As an agency directly on the front lines of intimate partner violence work, I want to offer the insight we've gained by operating during this pandemic and also share some of the escalating risk and barriers to safety facing LGBTQ survivors of violence.

**What we are seeing during COVID-19**

What we are seeing during the COVID-19 pandemic is the very real danger LGBTQ and HIV-affected survivors are facing at home, where they may be sheltering in place with people who cause them harm. Though in this hearing we are focusing on the issues of intimate partner violence, it's important to point out that for LGBTQ and HIV-affected people, violence that takes place at home includes not just harm from intimate partners, but also from homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic roommates, family members, landlords, neighbors, and other people that survivors are quarantined with during this time.

Our 24/7 bilingual hotline has not yet spiked with new callers, but similar to what we saw after Hurricane Sandy, we think the influx will be coming as stay-at-home restrictions ease, with previous clients and callers calling in, and more and more reports being submitted through our website's online form. Half of those calling our hotline currently are calling about issues directly related to COVID-19. They are calling because they are without food, without shelter, without access to medical care, and they need our help navigating this new normal. AVP is there for them 24/7.



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One of our clients, Luis, whose story was featured on This American Life, became homeless when he tested positive for COVID-19. He lived in his car for days until he called us, desperate and at his wits' end. We were able to get him immediate shelter that has transformed into permanent housing, food, and medical care and he is doing much better now, working with us on his asylum case. Another client we've worked with had to return to live with their family when they were left without work due to COVID-19. They are working via video with their clinician at AVP, safety planning and dealing with the emotional, physical, and economic health consequences of the pandemic. Immunocompromised, the survivor of sexual violence is now subjected to abuse from their family, not only about their LGBTQ identity, but also because the family believes they bring contagion into the home when the survivor goes out to pick up medical supplies they need to survive. While the survivor would like to flee, they have nowhere to go without resources besides shelter, and given their health concerns they are terribly afraid to contract the virus, and then run the risk of transmitting it to someone else. The survivor told their counselor, "They say if you go out, you are responsible for somebody dying."

One thing we are exploring is increased outreach catered to friends and family of survivors because what we have noticed is that our hotline often receives calls from worried chosen family, family, or community members. With decreased community supports due to social isolation, survivors are more isolated in abuse than ever, and we must find ways to reach them during this time where abuse is even more hidden behind closed doors.

For all survivors, there is less access to mental health resources as many therapists and counseling locations are not operating due to the crisis, or wait lists due to reductions in staffing. Even if folks can access services, it is often daunting to start that process of sharing their trauma with a stranger they have never met, over video. Survivors are also facing increased economic insecurity, especially for low income, working class LGBTQ workers in informal economies, including sex work.

Even IPV survivors who have escaped an abusive relationship continue to have legal and counseling needs. Our Legal Department represents clients with their VAWA immigration petitions (undocumented person married to a U.S. Citizen), whose partners have received the stimulus check meant for the couple or family, and have refused to give any of the funds to them.

Additionally, undocumented survivors who have successfully left abusive relationships are contemplating or have returned to abusive relationships after being laid off from work, in order to survive this financial crisis. These survivors do not have access to unemployment benefits, federal stimulus checks or other safety nets and are in dire need of assistance.

### Shifting work.

All of these challenges require our work to shift in big ways. We have moved our services online and are working remotely full-time to serve our clients and do advocacy and legal work. Our counseling services and legal departments are seeing clients over video calls and by phone. Our service and advocacy teams have been working to provide trainings for providers on safety planning in this era of COVID-19 where many folks are sheltering in place with people causing them harm. Just this week, a training for crime victims advocates working in precincts via webinar reached its limit of 100 participants, and we reached 100 more sexual violence advocates in a training honoring Sexual Violence Awareness Month, focusing on working with LGBTQ sexual violence survivors during COVID-19. We are continuing to offer our Trans, Gender Non-



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Conforming Leadership Academy as well as programming for people in the sex trades and survivors of hate violence remotely and we are checking in with community members regularly.

Requests and needs around housing and economic security are increasing and will continue to do so. Especially as economic insecurity increases the potential for financial abuse grows. Survivors are endangered in many other ways by making them dependent on more insecure or health-risking forms of earning money and a deeper reliance on a harm-causing partner or person in their lives.

### Current and future needs.

These challenges and the shifting work creates needs for our organization so we can better serve LGBTQ and HIV affected survivors of violence. Because of the likely continuation of social isolation, AVP hopes to secure an online chat platform for our hotline to better assist survivors who may not be able to call while someone who causes them harm is right in their shared living space. We also hope to secure other ways to report including an encrypted app to become more accessible during this time. Our hotline has been powered by volunteers for almost 40 years, and we typically train three new cohorts of volunteers a year. During this crisis, we are unable to offer our typical 40 hour in-person training and will be adapting the full training for remote access. In the meantime, many of our past volunteers have stepped up to re-engage and take hotline shifts, and we have identified a need to offer stipends to community members taking on this work. At a time when many of our community members are struggling economically, it's important to be able to stipend folks for their labor whenever possible. Additionally, when we are able to do in person outreach and connect with our community members at events, we distribute thousands of pocket-size resources and cards with our hotline number on them. As we adapt to doing more online outreach, we need to be able to fund increased production of graphics as well as ad buys to get more eyes on the resources we have to offer.

We stand with our partners in the nonprofit sector advocating against any cuts to discretionary funding. While the most recent guidance from the City Council to city agencies on April 24th is closer to the reassurance nonprofits seek, the requirements and guidance for reimbursement for work done after March 22 have us concerned as most of the organizations receiving discretionary contracts are deep rooted in communities and have shifted their services to continue to serve community members and should not experience retroactive cuts.

But the communities most impacted by COVID-19 are the communities heavily reliant on discretionary funding, which only accounts for 0.42% of the city budget. Discretionary funding is how small organizations closest to New Yorkers and organizations led by people of color get access to public funding. Instead of cutting discretionary funding, we call on the city to find more impactful efficiencies, while maintaining a low-cost budget line with huge impact for under-served communities. We also support what other nonprofits are calling for: restricted funding to be made general operating support, eliminating the hearings requirement for FY20 contract registration, no retroactive cuts, and at least two weeks planning time if a program must end. These concrete actions the Council can take will support community based organizations led by and serving those most impacted by COVID-19.

AVP looks forward to our continued partnership with the Council to ensure that NYC's LGBTQ communities have access to culturally responsive, inclusive, and affirming safety, support, and services, during and after



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this pandemic. We hope to be in continued contact with you, Chairs Rosenthal and Richards, to help the needs of both our clients and your constituents during this turbulent time.

Beverly Tillery  
Executive Director  
[btillery@avp.org](mailto:btillery@avp.org)



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### **The Center for Anti-Violence Education**

*Impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on Domestic Violence in New York City,  
Legislation T2020-6105*

Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Public Safety & Committee on Women  
& Gender Equity  
May 1, 2020

By Loren Miller, Executive Director & Jewel Cadet, Director of Programs

Thank you for reading our testimony.

#### **Organizational Mission and Reach**

The Center for Anti-Violence Education has worked to prevent gender, sexual and hate-based violence since 1974. We do this in two ways - by teaching empowerment self-defense to folks who are marginalized and at highest risk, and by teaching Upstander tools, so that more New Yorkers can move from being bystanders to violence, to Upstanders working to disrupt and help heal. Every year we work with more than 3000 New Yorkers across the five boroughs, through partnerships with service providers, public institutions, workplaces and schools, impacting more than 30 different City Council Districts.

Over 75% of those we work with identify as women (cis-gender or trans), and the remainder are gender-non-conforming, trans or male. Over 50% of those we work with identify as a survivor of sexual abuse, child abuse, DV, and/or hate violence. Over 60% say they have experienced some form of emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse in their lifetimes. We bring an intersectional gender, sexuality and anti-racist lens to all of our work.

As a result of CAE's programming, participants report they are 95% more likely to implement new skills to protect themselves, such as de-escalating and diffusing harm. Over 90% say that they feel more equipped and more likely to step in and prevent harm directed at others.

#### **Programming Made Possible by City Council Discretionary Funds**

Discretionary funds account for half of The Center for Anti-Violence Education's (CAE) entire budget. These funds are what means we can deliver responsive, empowering, life changing programs to so many survivors, folks at risk, and the service providers who work with survivors. CAE has five City Council Discretionary contracts: one with DYCD and four with MOCJ - CSA, PSA, HVPI and DOVE, through Safe Horizons. Because Council committed those funds to us, we have been able to commit to communities who need us. The needs for our work have not changed - indeed they've intensified. CAE did not go on pause on March 22. We had a job to do and no one told us to stop working. People needed us and we figured out how to support our communities within the guidelines of social distancing.

## **COVID-19 Crisis Response**

Beginning in early March, as the reality of COVID-19 became increasingly clear, we began preparing to pivot our strategy. We developed new workshops with online, remote capacity to address the core social implications of the virus and the fallout from not so doing. Below is a snapshot of our essential services.

### **Mitigating Domestic, Intimate Partner and Family Violence**

We worked closely with DV providers since mid-March to figure out how to help mitigate what was certain to be an increase in cases of intimate partner violence, family violence and child abuse - which has indeed been happening. To address the increase in family violence since sheltering at home, we built a harm reduction approach into two new online workshops, packaging and delivering them in a benign way so that folks at risk could get support in ways that are non-threatening to those in their homes who might cause harm and be triggered. On April 1, we launched a weekly Social Care during Social Distancing workshop and on April 7 launched a two part, four-hour workshop promoted to reduce tension in homes caused by COVID-19, teaching skills of de-escalation and non-violent communication. We have offered these two programs twice weekly for a full month and trained well over 150 people in one month alone. Forty-nine percent of those we trained were service providers, working with clients at home in DV situations or through shelters. These providers are carrying a tremendous burden and reported that what they learned through our workshops they would communicate to their clients, thus amplifying the impact of this work well beyond the 150 people we already trained. Fifty-one percent of these participants were not affiliated with any organization and 64% reported having experienced abuse.

### **Mitigating Violence with Adolescent and Teen**

Girl-Identified, Gender-non conforming and Transgender Young People

We've also continued our intensive, longer-term programming with adolescents, teens and young adults who are survivors of violence and at risk - adapting programming to also support youth who are processing the trauma and in homes faced by the compounded stress of job cuts, illness and uncertainty. This includes our school-based afterschool programs in Brooklyn Schools, our Center-based programs and one-time workshops for teens through partner organizations. Since March 13 we've been working with our youth Peer Educators to adapt the anti-violence trainings they conduct annually with hundreds of their peers to an online format. They have been working since March 22 to move their annual anti-violence youth summit, to an online format. It is scheduled for an entire week in May along with a range of other youth leaders from across the five boroughs and open to kids from middle school through high school. The funding for this work comes from DOVE.

While most of our work has been online, we worked in person until March 30 with our LGBTQ youth and young adults who are homeless and staying at the Shelter at Sylvia's Place in midtown Manhattan. This was made possible because our Senior Instructor who works part-time, also works partially at MCCNY's Sylvia's Place. Our Instructor continues to provide support to residents at the Shelter, helping participants adapt ways to practice 'Self-Defense'

and being an "Upstander" in the context of the risks of COVID-19. Supporting marginalized folks to build empowerment Self-Defense tools and engage all New Yorkers as Upstanders against Hate Violence is the purpose of our organization.

CAE's Peer Educators and Pride Protectors receive stipends for what they do in leadership internships. Stipends enable low-income youth to participate in rich learning environments, build critical life and professional skills, and contribute to the well-being of their communities. Without the stipends, these youth would miss out and so would all of us. They would have to select different income-earning activities and we would all lose out on their contributions to building anti-violence cultures and community, impacting hundreds and sometimes thousands of New Yorkers every year..

#### Disrupting and Preventing Hate Violence from Xenophobia and Scapegoating

On March 17, through programs funded by MOCJ HVPI, we launched our online Upstander program to raise awareness of the rise of xenophobia since COVID-19, especially against AA and API communities, and provide practical tools to disrupt the scapegoating and bias - whether online, in public spaces, or in media and public narratives. We've since run multiple workshops per week, partnering with the NYC Commission on HR and through them, trained service providers and Commissioners from other City Agencies. We have also trained Mandarin speaking staff at CCHR and will continue working with them to translate and adapt the workshop for monolingual Chinese speaking Communities. This work has helped CCHR launch a team to respond to COVID-19 discrimination. Since March 22 alone, we have trained well over 200 New Yorkers in these Upstander/active bystander intervention strategies against scapegoating and xenophobia. CAE's high school Peer Educators dedicated the last five weeks to adapting this digital workshop to a youth audience, to engage their peers in learning about xenophobia and how to disrupt hate violence. This is almost ready to launch and we've already had multiple requests across school districts. Without restoration of our City Council Discretionary funds, we have no resources to run these programs.

#### Risks to Ignoring the Violent Social Implications of this Virus

CAE staff has carried out a herculean task of responding to our communities and keeping close to five hundred New Yorkers engaged in building positive tools to stay safe just since we went remote. Staff has carried out this work even as half of them have had one or more deaths in their families, three have been sick and three have family members they care for currently ill. CAE's work is designed to address vulnerabilities of New Yorkers already marginalized and staff represent the communities we serve - black, brown, women, queer, trans and from low-income backgrounds. CAE is not providing health care or food, but we are providing critical support services directly designed to mitigate the violent social implications of this crisis. As each of us know, the trauma and risks to our communities are magnified with this crisis and the fatalities and displacement disproportionately fall on those already at the margins. These are the communities that The Center for Anti-Violence Education's programs continue to work to benefit. The world is in a crisis but the City's efforts to not honor contracts that are fundamental to operations for vulnerable communities, and moreover, to retroactively suspend contracts after the work has happened is compounding the fallout of this crisis. COVID-19 is expanding the

range of New Yorkers who are vulnerable. But sidelining those who have been vulnerable since long before the crisis is a terrifying comment on who we as a City are willing to render expendable.



**TESTIMONY OF LISA ALEXANDER, SENIOR STAFF ATTORNEY, DAY ONE  
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL, COMMITTEES ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND ON WOMEN  
AND GENDER EQUALITY, REMOTE HEARING TO ADDRESS THE IMPACT OF  
CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN NEW YORK CITY**

May 1, 2020

Thank you, Council Members, for holding this virtual hearing on the important topic of domestic violence during COVID-19. This has been a challenging time for survivors and providers alike and we greatly appreciate the Council's efforts to host a forum dedicated to addressing the unique issues presented by this global crisis.

Every year Day One educates and assists more than 25,000 youth, aged 24 and under, through a combination of educational, social, and legal services. We are the only nonprofit in New York that commits its full resources to addressing intimate partner abuse among this vulnerable population.

Young people face a scope of issues unique to them because of their age, worsened by the current crisis. Minors are usually unaware of the provisions of Title IX or that they can pursue access to the justice system. At home, young people often face a lack of privacy, which makes it difficult for them to comfortably communicate with counselors or attorneys. Additionally, technology abuse is incredibly common among young people; fifty percent of youth aged 14--24 have experienced some form of it. During COVID-19, while people are on lockdown with increased access to their phones and computers, technology-based abuse is likely skyrocketing --- including harassment, invasions of privacy, stalking, revenge porn, and verbal and emotional abuse. Imagine you're a teenager, feeling like your only link to a supportive community is online, but you're also being harassed, shamed, and criticized in the same space. Day One staff heard of a partner asking their girlfriend to keep her Facetime on all day to monitor her behavior and prevent her from speaking to anyone else. Students currently have minimal outlets, other than the Internet, and little access to helping professionals; teachers and other supportive adults are far away. The abuse feels overwhelming, isolating, and frightening, and these feelings are particularly amplified by the isolation and uncertainty COVID-19 has caused.

Along with risks to their physical and mental health, our clients and their families are confronting lost employment, decreased income, and interruptions to their education. Young people who share a household with an abusive partner are at increased risk while they are unable to leave home for work, school, or even regular trips to the grocery store. We are hearing of young survivors sneaking to call us at Day One when their partner runs an errand. As ICE continues to operate aggressively, young survivors who are undocumented or have undocumented family members are discouraged from seeking medical care, legal protection, or even leaving the house for food out of fear. While we have pivoted to using remote-based services to communicate with clients who are at home, each new application comes with new confidentiality and privacy concerns.

Day One is uniquely poised to assist young people through these challenges. Our organization ensures that all of our youth-focused services acknowledge the intersecting identities and complex dynamics of intimate partner violence, youth sexuality, and consent. Our legal department routinely assists young clients with obtaining orders of protection, petitioning for custody, visitation, and child support, and criminal justice advocacy. Our social services department provides critical counseling services to young survivors, giving them the tools to heal. Our educational programs teach middle and high school students about healthy relationships and link them to direct services.

Day One's physical office temporarily closed on March 13th. However, we have continued to deliver the youth-centered services we are known for, and we have developed new and creative ways to serve our clients remotely. For example, our school-based social workers and educators are actively engaging with youth via social media. They have hosted Instagram Lives (interactive online sessions) discussing services we offer, tips to maintain mental health during COVID-19, and Denim Day 2020, and created virtual trainings on issues related to dating and domestic violence to equip adults to help youth at risk.

Our social workers continue to provide counseling to clients, either by phone or by video chat depending upon the client's preference, and devise safety plans tailored to clients being quarantined with abusers or cohabiting with family members. One client recently told her case manager that she didn't know whether she would be alive if it weren't for the safety planning and support she received from Day One.

Our legal team has kept up to date with the fluid legal landscape by connecting with city, state, and national coalitions. They regularly participate in meetings with court personnel and raise issues specific to the client population we serve. They continue to offer confidential legal screenings over the phone, keep in contact with clients through text messaging and other applications, and are prepared to appear in the virtual courtrooms. Day One's hotline, text line, and website all remain up and running, connecting people to the emergency help they need.

As all of you are aware, victims of domestic and dating violence face challenges even under the best of circumstances. We have seen COVID-19 exacerbate existing difficulties and create new ones. Several service-seekers have reported being quarantined in a home with an abusive partner. We have had to coordinate times to speak with them when the abuser is out of the home, or have limited our discussions to e-mail or text message. Some of our teen clients also don't feel safe speaking around their parents or other family members, so we have also had to coordinate different times or methods to engage with them. Our safety plans now must consider factors such as whom a client is isolating with and whether shelters currently have enough space to offer sufficient social distancing measures.

From a legal perspective, clients have been cut off from seeking child support due to the virtual court's lack of resources. For our undocumented clients, or clients with undocumented family members, federal COVID-19 aid and public assistance remain out of reach.

Financial issues have also rendered it difficult for clients to remain in contact with us during the pandemic. Clients have had their phones shut off because they are unable to afford the monthly phone bills. Some had their Internet shut off; the clients and our staff had to advocate for it to be turned back on. Many of our young clients have lost their jobs, have had their hours reduced, or work in an essential services industry where their health is regularly at risk. Many more attend school full-time and are thus unable to work at all. The process for obtaining free laptops through schools and free Wi-Fi and discounted Internet has proved cumbersome for many young people and their families. Clients have also faced lengthy delays in obtaining unemployment benefits. One client applied nearly a month ago, waited days before they could complete the process, and had their application denied this week. One teen parent, whose child support case is adjourned indefinitely, spent weeks trying to locate free diapers and other supplies until we connected her with available resources.

Day One is starting to see increasing outreach from survivors at risk, and, like other expert providers, we expect a massive influx of requests for services once people are able to leave their homes freely. To protect young survivors of dating, domestic, and sexual violence -- both during and after the COVID-19 crisis -- Day One respectfully asks that the City Council:

- 1. Continue to fully fund programming and services for FY20.** City agencies have not all made assurances that programs will be level-funded and are questioning the importance of

critical services delivered by staff that have already been paid. Programs need to maintain their current staff and be able to grow to meet the inevitable demand after the pandemic.

2. **Maintain and increase funding for domestic violence services in FY21.** No matter how well the city and the domestic violence providers do in their outreach, some survivors will not be able to pursue assistance until they are able to return to work or school. Domestic violence is on the rise in New York, nationally, and globally. When “New York On Pause” begins to lift and clients can more freely access services, we expect to see an influx of people seeking counseling, case management, and legal assistance.
3. **Fund increased costs related to delivering services during the pandemic.** City agencies have not committed to cover increased expenses that are a direct result of the pandemic. For example, staff have been using phones and purchasing apps like Zoom to conduct their work remotely. We also will need to buy cleaning supplies, including disinfectant sprays and wipes, when our office reopens to ensure a healthy work environment for staff and clients. We also anticipate that staff and clients may need to wear PPE, including masks, when visiting our office or attending school and court. Depending on the state of public transportation, we may have to provide clients with access to ride shares like cabs or Uber.
4. **Recognize that all domestic violence services, including those provided in school settings, are essential services.** Outreach, awareness, and educational programming all serve as the primary linkage between young survivors and the direct services they need. Young people in particular may not have the language, experience, or exposure to resources necessary to identify abusive behaviors for what they are. They need accurate information in their schools and knowledgeable adults around them. Efforts to equip caregivers and teachers with skills and resources allow them to identify abuse and link students to safety. Additionally, studies have clearly shown that when middle and high schoolers understand healthy relationships, they are less likely to stay in abusive ones.
5. **Do not neglect the need for Dating Abuse and Sexual Violence information and services for youth, particularly in light of COVID-19.** Young people at risk need tailored services by specialists that understand their experiences, the unique barriers they face, and the personalized relief that is available. As an example, Day One creates materials using youth-oriented language to explain access to orders of protection. Our expert staff is equally skilled at addressing immigration challenges faced by minors, a school safety transfer, and pursuing a stay-away order that includes social media. As young women aged 16-24 are at the highest risk for dating abuse and sexual violence, now is not the time to cut funding to lifesaving programs like Day One. Without valuable youth- and trauma-informed direct services for survivors, the rates of dating abuse and sexual violence will be even more severe. Today’s pandemic should not create an additional crisis down the road. The cost of intimate partner violence against women in the United States is estimated to be \$8.3 billion a year. Your continued support will help us keep young people safe, relieve the need for more critical services in the future, save resources in the middle to long term, and ensure that resources are available to young people now and in the future.

Thank you for allowing us to speak to these issues. We would be honored to partner further with those of you who would like to examine this issue in greater detail. Please help us as we continue to partner with the Family Justice Centers and city agencies to do this critical



and life-saving work. Thank you for prioritizing these issues and for your continued support of young survivors and Day One.

**Committee on Public Safety, jointly with the Committee on Women and Gender Equity**  
**Met Council Testimony**  
**May 1, 2020**

The mission of Family Violence Program at Met Council is to assist New Yorkers impacted by intimate partner violence and sex trafficking to become empowered and obtain safety, foster healing, and work towards self-sufficiency.

The program is one of the only programs in New York City that offers comprehensive case management services, trauma-informed psychotherapy, financial assistance, and food assistance under one roof. Our number one priority when working with clients is ensuring that they are safe and then to lead them toward a path of sustainability. We are keenly aware of the specific challenges that survivors in the Jewish community face when they are in a violent situation and all of our staff are specially trained to help meet the specific cultural needs of this community. Our community partners often send their Jewish referrals to Met Council as they recognize how crucial it is to in provide culturally informed care to these survivors.

Over the past five years, Met Council's Family Violence Program has seen a 40% increase in the number of clients we serve and the need for support is clearly growing. In the first half of FY20 alone, the program has served 479 unique clients with comprehensive services. Our staff are committed to giving each client the time and support they need to ensure that they are safe and on the path to healing and sustainability.

In our opinion, the pandemic and its attendant stay at home orders has made a bad situation worse—leaving survivors with critically fewer routes to safety. Since the outbreak of the pandemic and subsequent stay at home orders Met Council has been working tirelessly to assess and address the needs of survivors and have seen a 52% increase in our intakes in the past two months. We have recognized that there has been higher risk to survivors who have already left their partners, as well as elevated risk for New Yorkers who are now finding themselves in an abusive situation for the first time. Met Council's Family Violence Team has continued to assess and address the needs of this vulnerable population and continues to ensure that all New Yorkers who are experiencing intimate partner violence can reach out and obtain the critical services they need to ensure their safety.

### **Trends the program has seen since the pandemic began:**

In the past few weeks Met Council has seen new trends of how people are being abused as a direct result of this pandemic. We have seen many survivors who were working on a plan to leave their abusers change their plans due to the stay at home order and fears of contracting Covid-19 if they went to a shelter. Additionally, many survivors lost their income and now feel additional financial strain preventing them from leaving or unfortunately leading them to going back to their abuser. For survivors who have managed to stay relatively safe while experiencing some “mild” forms of abuse, we have seen the abuse escalate to more intense and more violent forms of physical and emotional abuse. Previously, survivors used to be able to get a break from their partner while their partners were at work and they were able to leave their home; however, now they are with their partners all day which has increased the intensity and frequency of the abuse.

Met Council has also seen trends in forms of abuse related to Covid-19. We have heard from many survivors who have told us their abuser is not practicing social distancing and after being outside will refuse to wash their hand or use sanitizer before approaching or touching survivors or their children. Additionally, we have seen that when abusers have contracted Covid-19 they often do not quarantine themselves and place tremendous blame on the survivor for “making them sick.” Additionally, many survivors have not been allowed to look for employment as a part of the violence before the pandemic began and now are being blamed for their abuser’s loss of income and additional financial stress the family faces. Given the additional stress families now face, the program has seen an increase in physical violence in the past few weeks. We have seen many more incidences of choking as well as increased sexual violence.

Met Council has also noticed a trend for clients who have left their abusers and have orders of protections but abusers continue to have visitation with their children. We have had clients who know that their abusers have been tested positive and/or are not practicing stay at home orders or social distancing now have to send their children to their father for visits. This has created an incredible amount of stress on both survivors and their children as survivors must choose between the health and safety of their children and the consequences of violating a family court visitation order if they choose not to send their children to see their parent.

### **Challenges Met Council is Hoping City Council could help with:**

The Family Violence Program has recognized the incredible amount of work and services that the domestic violence advocate community has been able to deliver

execute during this pandemic. As advocates we still have some roadblocks that we are asking City Council to look into these challenges and to provide additional support and assistance. One of the most critical issues we have seen is when a partner is arrested due to intimate partner violence, they are released very quickly and often the survivor has not properly been informed that their abuser has been released. This has created increased levels of safety risks for survivors and their children. Additionally, we have seen survivors who are currently in domestic violence shelter be timed out of their 90 stay and are now being funneled to the city's homeless shelters if they have not been able to secure housing. The challenge we have seen is that survivors are not safe in homeless shelters and often abusers have found them and have continued the violence after leaving shelter. Even if clients have received a city voucher for an apartment while in shelter, it has been exceptionally challenging to find an apartment that accepts the voucher and expedite the process of approval for them to move in before their shelter stay is up. As stated earlier, we have also struggled with guidance regarding what survivors who are not with their abusers should do regarding shared custody if there is known contraction of Covid-19 or active non adherence to social distancing and sanitary guidelines. Additionally, a big challenge that we have struggled with before the pandemic began but that has been escalated in the past few weeks is the availability of safe shelters for single survivors. Single individuals with no children struggle with getting into DV shelters and are often at increased risk of continuing to stay in a dangerous situation due to lack of options. Often referring these clients to a homeless shelter does not provide the safety and emotional support needed to fully assist these survivors in obtaining safety and healing.

The Family Violence program at Met Council continues to focus its efforts in helping survivors obtain and maintain safety. Given the nature of the pandemic response and the stay at home orders that we all must live with we have significantly expanded access to our helpline by extending hours to midnight and now being open 6 days a week; to better meet the increased demand and community needs. Met Council recognizes that we could only do this critical work with the support and assistance of City Council and the DOVE Initiative. Currently, the agency is still waiting for funding that was allocated to Met Council last year. During this difficult time, these funds are critical for us to continue providing the essential care and support to this vulnerable population. We also recognize that after the stay at home orders are lifted we are likely to see a tremendous influx of domestic violence survivors who will feel safer in reaching out for help. In efforts of ensuring that the agency continues to be able to assist these individuals, Met Council respectfully requests the assistance of City Council to help push the registration of this initiative through to ensure that we could continue to function and support survivors. The agency would like to thank City Council for their continued commitment and support in helping us ensure that all New Yorkers of all cultures have the ability to obtain and maintain safety in their lives.

# **NORTHERN MANHATTAN IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION (NMIC)**

## **TESTIMONY**

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

PRESENTED BEFORE:

Committee on Women and Gender Equity (Jointly with the Committee on Public Safety)

Friday May 1, 2020

PRESENTED BY:

Morgan Siegel, LMHC

Assistant Director for Case Coordination

*NORTHERN MANHATTAN IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION (NMIC)*

Good Morning Chair and council members. My name is Morgan Siegel and I am the Assistant Director for Case Coordination, at Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation (hereafter, “NMIC”). On behalf of NMIC, we would like to thank you for inviting us to provide testimony on the resolution calling for the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on Domestic Violence in New York City.

NMIC is a community-based settlement house founded in 1979. We have grown into a leading multi-service agency with a staff of over 140 persons, serving low income persons and families primarily in New York City. During the COVID-19 crisis, NMIC has shifted services to continue to provide critical community support in response to our current public health crisis. To address evolving and emergent needs, NMIC operationalized four emergency hotlines in areas that have seen drastic increases as the city continues to respond to COVID-19. Hotline assistance is currently available in Spanish and English and offered for benefits, housing, immigration, and unemployment services.

NMIC has served survivors of domestic violence since 1998 through its community based Domestic Violence Project (hereafter, “DVP@NMIC”). We serve primarily immigrant survivors of Latin America who live below the poverty line, speak limited to no English and have deep fears due to immigration status. DVP@NMIC is comprised of a team of bilingual and bicultural counselors, attorneys and advocates who provide holistic support and expertise. All services are trauma informed, no cost, confidential and long term.

DVP@NMIC has been responsive and adapted services to continue to provide access to support for survivors via various platforms such as What’s App, text, email and other safe forms. The team has been able to provide virtual support groups in Spanish, which foster community

and allow for information sharing and connection during a time of physical distancing. Staff provide virtual trauma focused therapy via telephone and video, work closely with community partners to conduct outreach, and provide crisis intervention. Since survivors' safety and independence is directly linked to having access to essential basic needs, DVP@NMIC continues to address economic empowerment linking survivors to benefits, emergency grants, food pantries and other resources.

DVP@NMIC's dedicated legal team provides advice, advocacy and legal representation to survivors, including assistance with matters of custody, support, divorce and emergency orders of protection. Additionally, NMIC's Immigration team offers legal screenings and representation for humanitarian forms of relief for DV survivors, such as U-Visas and VAWA applications. Our Housing Unit continues to provide advice and representation to clients who are facing an intersection of housing and domestic violence issues. Our DOVE initiative funding provides direct services in both Spanish and English to vulnerable survivor New Yorkers and is key to responding and stabilizing our community post COVID-19. NMIC is an existing trusted resource in the community with connections to hard-to-reach, especially immigrant, communities who otherwise may not access the domestic violence supportive services. COVID-19 has impacted survivors' sense of independence, financial stability, and safety which is why continued funding is pivotal in response to address the unique needs of our immigrant survivors.

Survivors of domestic violence are vulnerable to experiencing additional life-threatening risk factors related to coronavirus. Isolation, increased risk for abuse and susceptibility to contracting COVID are impacting survivors increasingly as time goes by. Not only are immigrant survivors coping with ongoing and past trauma often triggered by the current pandemic, but they are faced with a multitude of systematic and contextual barriers that place

them in the eye of the storm within the epicenter of the pandemic. Social distancing practices can often keep survivors in a home that is unsafe and further perpetuate a batterer's ability to isolate and control victims.

Abusive partners have been able to utilize this pandemic to exert power and control by continuing to use tactics of emotional, financial, physical and sexual abuse. Some batterers have threatened to forego social distancing so as to intentionally contract and infect victims with the virus, causing additional concerns for emotional and psychological trauma. Other survivors report that their ex partners have refused to obey their regular, court-ordered visitation schedules or threatened to call ACS if a survivor does not give up her job as an essential worker. With families quarantined at home, we have also heard from clients about an increase in substance abuse, children exposed to witnessing abuse and sexual abuse.

These dynamics can be extremely fluid and survivors can have little opportunity to seek out help safely. Before COVID-19, survivors often had the ability to seek help safely when abusive partners were at work or by coming to NMIC's offices after dropping children at school. Neighbors and family members who may have been a source of social support in the past can be less inclined to intervene for survivors out of fear of contracting COVID-19. Survivors have expressed fear of entering shelters where congregate care may seem to pose more of a risk to a family's health. These diminished opportunities for engagement in services, further isolate victims of domestic violence and limit survivors access to services. DVP@NMIC has addressed this by utilizing peer networks and communicating with survivors by email, text, What's App and other social media platforms to expand access when the opportunity presents itself. We have also been more flexible and responsive to survivors calling outside of normal business hours when possible.

Finally, low income women and communities of color have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Due to the intersectionality of these issues layered on top of intimate partner violence, survivors face complex obstacles to achieving safety and healing. Some immigrant survivors sick with COVID can feel they have no other social support than an abusive partner to care for children. Many others are risking their health as home attendants, grocery cashiers and laundry mat employees to maintain or gain self-sufficiency so as not to rely financially on abusive partners. We have found that several survivors have been coping with complex trauma histories and the loss of relatives due to COVID has a triggering effect that is detrimental to their mental health. Still, other survivors who are undocumented may be fearful of seeking healthcare without having insurance or becoming a public charge. Interfacing with the criminal justice system can often be nuanced and complex for immigrant survivors. While they may want protection and justice, they often don't want batterers to be incarcerated, deported or lose their jobs. Now with COVID 19, survivors must grapple with making decisions that may result in an abusive partner becoming exposed to the coronavirus while in a correctional facility. In summary, immigrant survivors face dangerous tradeoffs and decisions that can seem overwhelming as they cope with domestic violence during this global pandemic. Having access to trusted, culturally competent and community-based services tailored to domestic violence survivors is more crucial than ever.

We would like to share with you the story of one of our clients who we call Maria\* (name and other identifying information has been changed for privacy). Maria is an undocumented immigrant with four children living in the Bronx, a short walk over the bridge to Washington Heights. A victim of strangulation, verbal abuse and coercive control -she had decided this past winter to separate from her abusive partner after many years of abuse. She

found new employment and felt emotionally stronger to cope with being a single parent. Shortly after NY on Pause and quarantine began, her abusive partner returned to the home after he lost his job. Their children insisted that he be allowed to return temporarily, and Maria felt a sense of compassion and obligation. They had met in Colombia as teenagers, and as the father of her children, she felt compelled to let him return. Life during quarantine has been tense, painful and frightening. Maria's abuser forced her to quit her job out of jealousy, also making her feel guilty for potentially placing the family at risk. He controls all of the finances and has begun to drink heavily. He is extremely jealous and berates her for being on her telephone, accusing her of speaking to other men. As a father, he constantly undermines her authority and disparages her in front of the children. Maria has decided against entering shelter fearing for her children's health and removing them from the only home they have known.

Maria and her counselor at DVP@NMIC have arranged for code words and safe times to call to provide safety planning, counseling and support. Maria has reached out in crisis during escalating arguments and her counselor stayed on the phone as she waited for the police to arrive. She is working with our family law attorney to discuss seeking an order of protection from family court and to provide empowerment through information on legal rights. Maria has also been assessed by our immigration attorney to explore a U visa petition. Finally, we are also addressing economic concerns by linking her to public benefits and other emergency assistance resources. Maria remains vulnerable, yet she is not alone. She is learning how to mitigate the risk, cope with her feelings and safely plan for a new beginning.

We respectfully request that the City Council continue funding community-based programs like DVP@NMIC that provide essential and life-saving services to clients like Maria. We share Maria's story because she is not unique, unfortunately her experience is similar to what

many survivors today are suffering through. We are in the opportune situation to serve survivors of domestic violence because we have a trusted relationship as a community-based organization for more than 40 years. Domestic violence work is fueled in large by hope and we have witnessed hundreds of survivors transform hope into safe, peaceful and meaningful lives. Our collective hope is to help contribute to the healing of New York City in these difficult times and not return to “normal,” but build more sustainable, violence free communities. The DOVE initiative and its financial commitment are invaluable to achieving this for survivors and all of New York City.

Once again, we thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and wish you, your families and your constituencies much health and safety.



Good afternoon. My name is Kelly Coyne, and I am the Deputy Program Officer at Safe Horizon, the nation's largest non-profit victims services organization. Safe Horizon offers a client-centered, trauma-informed response to 250,000 New Yorkers each year who have experienced violence or abuse. We are increasingly using a lens of racial equity to guide our work with clients, with each other, and in developing the public positions we hold.

I would like to offer a general overview of how Safe Horizon is operating during this pandemic, and then provide some reflections for how the City & City Council can engage New Yorkers who may be at risk of domestic violence and who may think they have no options to seek safety.

### Overview

Normally, Safe Horizon has close to 1,000 employees working in over 200 locations across New York City. These locations include courthouses, police precincts, Family Justice Centers, shelters, and other sites. Since the PAUSE went into effect, many Safe Horizon staff are now working remotely as their program sites have closed. For example, staff who normally sit in the city's five Family Courts are now helping their clients petition for orders of protection by telephone or other mediums. Advocates who normally sit in all 86 police precincts and Police Service Areas are reaching out via telephone to New Yorkers who file police reports related to domestic violence, assault, or other crimes. Similarly, our staff who normally sit in the five Family Justice Centers are continuing to offer safety assessments and safety planning to their clients over the phone. While the workplace may have shifted from on-site locations to homes and apartments throughout the metropolitan region, our staff continue to respond to victims of violence and abuse each day.

Some of our program sites have been deemed "essential" and are still operating, albeit at reduced capacity. All eight of our domestic violence shelters remain open and are providing safety and sanctuary to individuals and families fleeing violence in the home. Our five Child Advocacy Centers also remain open and are providing a coordinated investigation and response to child victims of sexual and/or severe physical abuse. Our Streetwork Project is continuing to respond to homeless and at-risk young people in need of shelter and services. This includes our overnight shelter and our two drop-in centers, which continue to help young people with curbside services and assistance. Finally, some of the advocates at our 24-hour hotlines are working from home, while others continue to come into our offices.

### Recommendations

At this time of great uncertainty and fear, we want to offer the following three words to all New Yorkers who may be feeling unsafe: *we are open*. While some program sites are physically

closed, Safe Horizon staff are reaching out to crime victims each day and offering services over the phone, or over Skype, or at our essential locations, which remain open. We are offering evidence-based mental health counseling to survivors over the phone, and we are helping domestic violence victims obtain orders of protection through virtual courts. Our web-based chatline (SafeChat) is offering a more private way for vulnerable New Yorkers to connect with Safe Horizon advocates, and we are working with the City to offer this service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We have even suggested social media messages for City Council Members to share in order to let their constituents know that our services are up and running.

Public messaging about safety options, then, is critically important. We urge the Council to partner with Safe Horizon and the entire network of community-based domestic violence providers to craft messages that reach the multitude of communities that make up this great city.

Further to that point, we are working closely with the 110 organizations funded through the City Council's DOVE Initiative to make sure appropriate services are available to New York's diverse cultural communities. Understanding the heightened fear in immigrant communities, especially during this health crisis, we are proud to partner with leading domestic violence organizations funded through DOVE that specialize in responding to New Yorkers no matter where they were born. The DOVE Initiative has always been important, but in this environment, at this moment in our history, it is literally a lifesaver for New Yorkers in every neighborhood and every community.

As the City Council considers what will almost certainly be an austere budget for FY21, we urge you and your colleagues to reflect on the special vulnerability that victims of domestic violence and other crimes face during this COVID-19 era. The domestic violence victim in need of legal representation to obtain an order of protection... the foreign-born sexual assault victim in need of immigration legal services... the child who deserves a coordinated investigation and response that expedites the healing process... all of these issues will continue to emerge as the pandemic continues and even more so in the weeks and months of any recovery period. We urge you to hold these individuals and families close to your heart as you craft the budget for the coming fiscal year.

Thank you, and I am happy to respond to any questions you may have.



**Testimony of Sanctuary for Families  
Submitted to the New York City Council, Committee on Women & Gender Equity  
Chair, Council Member Helen Rosenthal  
And Committee on Public Safety  
Chair, Council Member Donovan J. Richards  
(Hearing on May 1, 2020)**

Good afternoon. I am Judy Kluger, Executive Director of Sanctuary for Families, New York City's largest provider of services and outreach exclusively for survivors of domestic violence, sex trafficking, and related forms of gender-based violence. We are truly grateful to the City Council's Women & Gender Equity and Public Safety Committees for the opportunity to testify today. We appreciate the Council—in particular Chair Helen Rosenthal—for its leadership in addressing the dire, often life-threatening situations facing domestic violence survivors in these unprecedented times, and the complex challenges faced by essential service providers like Sanctuary in meeting their needs.

Long before New York City's first COVID-19 case, we were battling another public health crisis—high rates of domestic violence and sex trafficking that disproportionately harm already marginalized communities including women of color, immigrants, and the LGBTQ community. The grave dangers faced by victims quarantined with their abusers—or facing stalking and harassment by phone, text, email or social media—are compounded for these communities facing disproportionate layoffs, racism and xenophobia, and harsh federal policies that leave them out of relief plans and subject them to increased enforcement and harassment. Sanctuary's website traffic has more than doubled in the past month, and google searches for domestic violence have spiked nationwide. While some hotline numbers have not yet reflected these surges, there is wide recognition in the media and by policymakers at all levels—from Council Speaker Johnson to Governor Cuomo, to the UN Secretary General—that an explosion in domestic violence rates will occur in the weeks and months ahead. Essential service providers like Sanctuary must be prepared, including reassurance from the city that service contracts will be kept whole.

Already, we are seeing evidence that abuse is escalating in frequency and severity in quarantine. One of our clients called 911 after enduring multiple sexual assaults by her husband in the past few weeks; with Sanctuary's help, she was able to obtain a full stay-away order of protection. For those not living with abusers, we are observing increased instances of harassment and cyber-abuse via text, email and social media. Lower hotline numbers may actually be troubling evidence that victims have fewer safe moments to place calls; or that they believe their situation is not serious enough to warrant help right now; or that the assistance they need is no longer available or accessible—beliefs that are often weaponized by abusers. One Sanctuary client's abuser recently told her that "she better watch her back... because the courts are closed, so you can't do anything."

Among current Sanctuary clients, we are also seeing overwhelming food insecurity, with unemployment and lost wages at all-time highs. In addition to these basic survival needs, clients are facing complex legal issues with deep uncertainty about how or when they

can be addressed given court closures. Not surprisingly, we are seeing compounded levels of trauma, anxiety, and depression that demand clinical intervention; and serious stressors around parenting and managing remote learning for school-aged children.

Undocumented or partially documented immigrant abuse survivors face unique perils. Disproportionate numbers of them are part of the informal economy—unemployed or furloughed but not eligible for any federal relief. More than ever before, they have deep fears about accessing urgent services such as medical care or police assistance, with anxiety about the public charge rule, immigration enforcement, and broader anti-immigrant harassment creating a profound chilling effect that is only heightened in the COVID-19 era.

On the service delivery side, I am pleased to report that Sanctuary has pivoted rapidly to continue providing virtually all the essential services we have offered for years. Our five shelters remain open and at capacity, with multiple new intakes in the past month, and several units left vacant in case any family should be infected and need to be isolated. Residential aides are still providing 24/7 staffing. Our Legal Center has reached out to clients with needs surveys in 11 languages, and is continuing to pursue legal cases, closely monitoring court closures and other changes in procedures. Multiple Sanctuary attorneys staff our Legal Helpline, so callers always receive a “live” answer—vital in the stay-at-home era when abuse victims may have limited opportunities to safely place calls. The Center has been a leader in efforts to ensure that orders of protection remain available and accessible, with an army of *pro bono* attorneys assisting petitioners remotely, and informational flyers in many languages on social media, web ads, and screens in hospital and CBO waiting rooms and on taxis. Our Clinical Program is providing mental health counseling and case management to adults, children, and families via a secure telehealth platform. And our Economic Empowerment Program quickly purchased and configured 50 laptops with WiFi hotspots, and hand-delivered them to current trainees in its intensive career training program, which restarted remotely last Monday.

Our staff and survivor leaders have published safety planning guides for victims who are quarantined with abusers, as well as flyers and know-your-rights info sheets in many languages and broadcast them widely via our website, on social media, to city officials, and to other service providers. These outreach materials are also appearing on video displays on 100 taxis citywide, as well as on video screens in hospital and CBO waiting rooms. Several examples are attached with this testimony. The [safety planning guides](#) have been translated into [Spanish](#), [French](#), [Arabic](#), [Chinese](#), and other languages, and have received far-reaching exposure locally and nationally, with more than 100,000 shares on social media to date. We are especially grateful to Speaker Johnson for sharing these via Twitter several weeks ago: the impact of this exposure is enormous.

We have seen the City take many positive steps in response to this crisis, but have several key concerns and recommendations. At the top of the list is improving communication about available resources to the most vulnerable, including those living with their abusers or being aggressively harassed by them. The City can utilize its Notify NYC emails, texts, and social media alerts to publicize domestic violence resources—including the phone contacts for all five Family Justice Centers and Sanctuary's Legal Helpline, as well as our newly launched text chat numbers, which will allow abuse victims to directly reach

attorneys and clinicians via text message. The City can also display this information on WiFi kiosks, bus stops, and subway display screens citywide. We are very grateful to the Council Speaker and Members who have already pushed out some of this information, but the City can do much more to get reliable information to people in need—and to counteract a flood of misinformation spread by abusers and on social media.

We are grateful to our partners at the Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence (ENDGBV), who got the Family Justice Center intake and referral system up and running quickly after the FJC facilities closed in mid-March. ENDGBV's FJC administrators get referrals out quickly so Sanctuary and other CBOs can conduct screenings and provide services urgently. Despite ENDGBV's responsiveness, we know there are many more victims out there who are not accessing services, or not getting the help they need when they do reach out for help. The NYPD recently told service providers that Domestic Incident Reports were down 44% from last year at this time. This sobering statistic is certainly not due to lower rates of domestic violence: we must work together to find more effective ways to reach individuals and families suffering abuse in quarantine or otherwise cut off from channels of assistance.

While we recognize the strains on the NYPD and emergency services right now, we also have major concerns about the police response to domestic violence during the COVID-19 crisis. For survivors in danger, emergency services are their first and, sometimes, only line of defense. Multiple Sanctuary clients have reported issues with police enforcement, ranging from refusal to serve and enforce new protection orders to failure to arrest abusers who violate existing orders. One client, after managing to procure an exclusionary order of protection on a Friday night, contacted two police precincts, both of which told her they could only enforce the order if she had a hardcopy—she had only received the order by email of course, since the courts are closed—and were not even authorized to print it for her. Only after multiple late-night calls from a Sanctuary attorney did they agree to help. When another client's abuser came to her apartment in violation of a 5-year protection order, responding officers told him to leave, but declined to arrest him for an A Misdemeanor, which is by law a mandatory arrest. Lastly, we have heard disturbing reports of police attempting to enforce visitation orders, for which they have no authority. One client did not produce her child for visitation, as she had serious reservations about their health and safety in her ex-husband's home related to COVID-19 exposure: two police officers came to her door, entered her apartment without protective equipment, asked her about the order, and then filed a report saying they would return if she did not comply. This is highly alarming as police do not have authority to enforce civil custody and visitation orders.

For Sanctuary, the most urgent issue is financial: we need clear reassurance from the City that our contracts for domestic violence services will be honored for the balance of FY20, and renewed for FY21 to ensure the stability of our essential services for abuse survivors facing new and urgent needs. Reassurance about the continuity of services is vital: it is always challenging with discretionary grants to find out only at the end of June whether funding will be renewed in July—this year it is all but untenable.

It is only a matter of time before service providers begin to see a wave of new domestic violence cases—and the level of need among existing clients in this crisis will only deepen

in the difficult months ahead. Human service providers like Sanctuary and our community partners must be prepared to respond, at a minimum with reassurance that existing contracts will be restored, if not enhanced. We need city officials and law enforcement to work with us to ensure that abuse survivors know that their lives count, and their often-grave situations are worthy of timely, compassionate, and professional interventions, even amidst myriad concerns within this crisis we all face. Our thanks to the City Council for making these issues a priority, and for giving us the opportunity to testify today.

# SAFETY PLANNING - COVID19

## A GUIDE FOR SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

### 1. BUDDY SYSTEM CODE WORD

Identify at least two people that you can contact with a “code word” to let them know if you are in trouble. Plan in advance what they should do if you send them the code word.

### 2. “SAFEST ROOM”

If there is an argument, identify an area of the home you can move to where there are no weapons and there are ways for you to leave the house, apartment, or building, such as a door or window to exit the house/apartment.

For some survivors, especially those quarantined at home with an abuser during coronavirus, no room may feel safe, so we call it the “safest rooms”. If you can at least identify the lowest risk areas, you may be able to reduce harm.

### 3. PLANNING WITH CHILDREN

**CODE WORDS:** If you have children, decide how to communicate urgency with them. For example, one survivor would open her arms and her daughter knew that meant to come running to her for safety. Some survivors create a “code word” with their children that means they should go to the “safest room” in the home that you have already decided upon.

**EMERGENCY NUMBERS:** If for some reason you are not able to make emergency calls, give your children the safety number/s, if they are old enough.

### 4. NOTIFY THE POLICE BEFORE AN EMERGENCY

Ahead of time, you can notify your local police station of your concerns. Let them know the history and your concern of being in isolation due to coronavirus. It may be useful to speak with the Domestic Violence officer.

### 5. EXIT PLAN

In case you have to flee, create an exit plan ahead of time with someone who could support this need. Is there a trusted friend/relative who you can stay with, if needed?

### 6. SUPPLIES, FOOD & MEDICATION

Check your supplies and food. If you need food and do not have the money, check your local pantry, temple/church/mosque, etc., or other community organizations.

Remember to keep your medication in the safest, easily accessible location in case of emergency.

### 7. EMERGENCY BAG

Pack a bag with an extra set of keys, clothes for you and your children, a pay-as-you-go cellphone, medications, copies of important documents, etc.

### 8. IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS

Make copies or take pictures of your important documents for yourself and send them to a trusted friend or relative. (IDs, social security cards, immigration documents, birth certificates, health insurance information, and Orders of Protection) Be mindful of sending anything via phone or computer. Please use whatever method is safest for you.

### 9. SEEKING SOCIAL SUPPORT

With social distancing and quarantining, survivors can feel even more isolated, and abusers may use further isolation as a power and control tactic.

Identify trusted friends, relatives or online support groups where you can still connect virtually. If you have a friend who may be experiencing abuse, be sure to reach out to them even more during this time.

### 10. CREATE A “PEACEFUL SPACE”

If you cannot leave your home, try to create a “peaceful space” for yourself in your home (if that is safe for you). You can draw pictures of a more peaceful place and put them on a wall to help you take an emotional break to visualize a more peaceful place. This is also an activity you can do with your children. You can also write positive affirmations and put them up on the wall to remind yourself of your worth.

### 11. HOLDING ONTO YOUR PLAN

Consider keeping a list of your safety plan in your phone or wherever might be safe for you. Please consider what is safest for you.

If you choose to write your plan somewhere, consider listing only key words that help you remember the plan, but that would not be clear to your abuser. If this is not safe, try to memorize your plan, focusing on memorizing at least one key emergency number on your list of resources.

FOR MORE INFORMATION & RESOURCES, PLEASE VISIT

[sanctuaryforfamilies.org/safety-planning-covid19](https://sanctuaryforfamilies.org/safety-planning-covid19)



Sanctuary for Families

# PLAN DE SEGURIDAD-COVID19

## GUÍA PARA SOBREVIVIENTES DE VIOLENCIA DOMÉSTICA

### 1. PALABRA CLAVE / CÓDIGO DE AMIGOS

Identifique al menos dos personas con las que pueda contactar con una “palabra clave” para informarles si tiene problemas. Planifique de antemano lo que deberían hacer si les envía la palabra clave.

### 2. “HABITACIÓN MÁS SEGURA”

Si hay una discusión, identifique un área de la casa a la que pueda mudarse donde no haya armas y haya formas de salir de la casa, apartamento o edificio (puerta, ventana, etc.). Para algunos sobrevivientes, especialmente aquellos en cuarentena en casa con un abusador durante el coronavirus, ninguna habitación puede ser muy segura, por lo que la llamamos las “habitaciones más seguras”. Si al menos puede identificar las áreas de menor riesgo, puede reducir el daño.

### 3. PLANIFICACIÓN CON NIÑOS

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Si tiene hijos, decida cómo comunicar un sentido de urgencia. Por ejemplo, una sobreviviente le enseñó a su hija pequeña que si abría los brazos, ella debía correr hacia ella por seguridad. Algunos sobrevivientes también crean una “palabra clave” con sus hijos que significa que deben ir a la “habitación más segura” previamente acordada.

**NÚMEROS DE EMERGENCIA:** Si por alguna razón no puede hacer llamadas de emergencia y tiene hijos, deles a ellos el número al que deben llamar. Consulte la página web al final de esta guía para servicios y números telefónicos de emergencia.

### 4. AVISO PREVIO A LA POLICÍA

Antes de tiempo, puede notificar sus inquietudes a su estación de policía local. Hágales saber el historial y su preocupación de estar en aislamiento debido al coronavirus. Puede ser útil hablar con el oficial especialista en violencia doméstica.

### 5. PLAN DE ESCAPE

En caso de que tenga que huir, cree un plan de escape con anticipación con alguien que pueda apoyarle en momentos de necesidad. ¿Hay un amigo / familiar de confianza con el que pueda hospedarse, de ser necesario?

### 6. SUMINISTROS, COMIDA Y MEDICAMENTOS

Revise sus suministros y alimentos. Si necesita comida y no tiene el dinero, revise su despensa local, templo / iglesia / mezquita / etc. u otras organizaciones comunitarias.

Recuerde mantener sus medicamentos en el lugar más seguro y de fácil acceso en caso de emergencia.

### 7. BOLSA DE EMERGENCIA

Empaque una bolsa de emergencia con un juego extra de llaves, ropa para usted y sus hijos, un teléfono celular prepago, medicamentos, copias de documentos importantes, etc.

### 8. DOCUMENTOS IMPORTANTES

Saque fotos o copias de respaldo de sus documentos (IDs, tarjetas de seguridad social, documentos de inmigración, certificados de nacimiento, información sobre seguros de salud y órdenes de protección) y envíelos a un amigo o familiar de confianza. Tome precaución en cuanto al envío de cualquier cosa por teléfono o computadora.

### 9. BUSCAR APOYO SOCIAL

Con el distanciamiento social y la cuarentena, uno puede sentirse aún más aislado, y los abusadores pueden aprovecharse de esto para ejercer mayor poder y control. Identifique amigos de confianza, familiares o incluso grupos de apoyo en línea donde aún puede conectarse virtualmente. Si tiene algún amigo que pueda estar sufriendo de abuso, asegúrese de contactarlo aún más durante este tiempo.

### 10. CREAR UN “ESPACIO PACÍFICO”

Si no puede salir de su hogar, intente crear un “espacio pacífico” para usted en su hogar (siempre y cuando sea seguro para usted). Puede dibujar imágenes de un lugar más tranquilo y ponerlas en una pared para ayudarlo a tomar un descanso emocional y visualizar un lugar más sereno. Esta también es una actividad que puede hacer con sus hijos. También puede escribir afirmaciones positivas y ponerlas en la pared para recordar su valor como individuo.

### 11. AFERRARSE A SU PLAN

Considere mantener una lista de su plan de seguridad en su teléfono o en algún otro sitio relativamente seguro. Si elige escribir su plan en algún lugar, considere enumerar solo palabras clave que lo ayuden a recordar el plan, pero que su abusador no pueda entender. Si esto no es seguro, intente memorizar su plan, concentrándose en memorizar al menos un número de emergencia clave en su lista de recursos.

PARA MÁS INFORMACIÓN Y RECURSOS, VISITE

[sanctuaryforfamilies.org/safety-planning-covid19-es](https://sanctuaryforfamilies.org/safety-planning-covid19-es)



Sanctuary for Families

# 新冠疫情期间的自保规划

## 给家庭暴力幸存者的提示

### 1. 好友系统与暗号

与至少两个人约定好，在您遇到问题时可以通过指定好的暗号来知会他们。提前明确他们需要在您发来暗号时做什么。

### 2. “最安全的屋子”

如果发生争吵，确立家里一处没有武器并有门窗作为逃生出口的地方。对某些受害者，尤其是疫情隔离期间与施虐者共处一室的受害者而言，可能没有地方是真正安全的，所以我们称其为相对最安全的屋子。只要您能找到几处至少风险较低的地方，您就可以减少受到的伤害。

### 3. 与孩子一起规划

**暗号：**如果您有子女，约好如何与他们一起应对紧急情况。比如，一位暴力幸存者的女儿尚处幼年，而当幸存者张开双臂，那么他/她的女儿就知道该扑向他/她寻求保护。一些幸存者还会和他们的子女一起想一个暗号。一旦说起暗号，孩子们就明白该去提前定好的安全屋躲着。

**紧急联系人：**如果您因为某些原因无法拨打报警电话且与孩子在一起，要是孩子已经懂事，告诉孩子你们的紧急联系人号码。请查看文末资源章节列出的一些紧急联系号码。

### 4. 在出事前告知警察

您可以提前与所在地警察沟通您的顾虑，尤其是专从家庭暴力的警察。与他们讲明您之前遭受的家暴史，还有因新冠疫情被隔离在家所产生的担忧。

### 5. 逃生计划

以防万一，和一名可以帮助您的人提前商量好逃生计划。规划好如果逃走，您可以与哪些信任的亲朋好友住在一起。

### 6. 物资、食物、药品

清点您所有的物资与食品。如果您需要食物钱却不够，去当地食物领取处、寺庙、教堂、清真寺、或其他社区组织看看。请一定记得把应急药物放在易取且最安全的地方。

### 7. 应急包

准备一个应急包，里面最好装有一套多余的钥匙，您与孩子的衣物，足够的电话费，药物，重要文件的复印件等。

### 8. 重要文件

复印或拍照备份您的重要文件，发送给您信任的朋友或亲人。重要文件包括您的身份证明、社保卡、移民文件、出生证明、医保信息、与人身保护令。用手机或电脑发送文件时要注意上文提过的信息安全问题，一定要经您评估过最安全的方式来传送文件。

### 9. 访求社会支持

保持社交距离和检疫当中，幸存者也可能觉得更孤立，施暴者可能继续把孤立当作一种力量和控制手段。您可找出信赖的朋友、亲戚甚且网上的支持团体，做实质上的连结。如果你有朋友正在被暴力伤害，这时候您更要向他们伸出援手。

### 10. 创造和平的空间

在2019新型冠状病毒疾病突发时，许多幸存者觉得被迫花更多时间跟施暴者在一起，因为他们可能觉得离开家会不安全，以及待在家里也不安全。如果您不能离开家，您可以尝试在家里创造一个自己的“和平的空间”（如果这对您是安全的）。您可以画一张更和平的地方的图片，然后放在墙上帮助您度过一段轻松的时间，可以想象一个更和平的地方。这也是一项您可以跟孩子一起做的活动。您也可以写正向的短语，放在墙上来提醒您的价值。

### 11. 坚持您的计划

考虑在手机上或任何对您安全的地方保持一份安全计划的列表。请考虑什么是最安全的方法。如果选择写下您的计划，请考虑仅列出可帮助您记住计划的关键词，但是您的施暴者并不清楚您的计划。如果这样做不安全，请尝试记住您的计划，重点是记住资源列表中至少一个重要的紧急电话号码。

欲了解更多信息，请访问

[sanctuaryforfamilies.org/safety-planning-covid19-ch](https://sanctuaryforfamilies.org/safety-planning-covid19-ch)



Sanctuary for Families

# Are you experiencing domestic violence?

Victims of abuse can still secure orders of protection despite COVID-19 court closings

**Call our legal helpline anytime**

(212) 349-6009 x246

**Speak to a lawyer live**

Monday - Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM

**Visit [sanctuaryforfamilies.org/get-help](https://sanctuaryforfamilies.org/get-help)**



**Sanctuary**  
for Families

# ¿Está sufriendo de violencia doméstica?

Las víctimas de abuso aún pueden obtener órdenes de protección a pesar del cierre de las cortes debido a COVID-19

**Llame a nuestra línea de ayuda legal en cualquier momento**

(212) 349-6009 x246

**Hable con un abogado**

Lunes - Viernes, 9 AM a 5 PM

**Visite [sanctuaryforfamilies.org/get-help](https://sanctuaryforfamilies.org/get-help)**



**Sanctuary**  
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**ARE YOU EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?**

Victims of abuse can still secure temporary orders of protection despite COVID-19 court closings

Call Sanctuary for Families' Free Legal Helpline or visit our website to get help

**(212)349-6009 x246** [sanctuaryforfamilies.org/get-help](https://sanctuaryforfamilies.org/get-help)



**DO YOU FEEL UNSAFE IN YOUR HOME?**

**IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, HELP IS STILL AVAILABLE**

Learn about safety planning, securing orders of protection,  
and resources available to survivors at

[www.sanctuaryforfamilies.org](http://www.sanctuaryforfamilies.org)



**To:** The Honorable City Councilmembers Helen Rosenthal and Donovan Richards

**From:** Niketa Sheth, CEO Womankind

**Date:** May 1, 2020, Hearing for the Committee of Women and Gender Equity and the Committee of Public Safety: Impact of COVID-19 on Domestic Violence in NYC

Dear Councilmember Rosenthal and Councilmember Richards,

We appreciate the opportunity to submit a written testimony to the Committee of Women and Gender Equity and The Committee of Public Safety.

Thank you to the esteemed members, chairs and administration leadership for your efforts to address the impact of COVID-19 on domestic violence survivors, especially those in communities of color and immigrant communities in New York City.

I'd like to start by asking you to imagine what it may be like to be survivor during this extraordinary time. Imagine:

- You are a mother of a new born pre-mature baby, born at peak COVID, staying in emergency housing in order to keep you and your two children safe.
- You are a mother and child working to escape an abusive family, beginning to place your belongings outside of the home, only get caught by an adverse party.
- You are a survivor being forced by your abuser to engaged in sexual activity and experiencing threat around contraception. You cannot afford or access medical help.
- You are a survivor who desperately needs more food access to support yours and your children, yet your abusive partner has taken away all access to food stamps- exerting even more control and power of critical resources.
- You are a survivor who is sheltering in place with her abusive partner while already started the divorce process, due to courts closed, you simply "wait" and endure more anxiety, and abuse.

I ask you to feel into the lives of these individuals. These are real stories of Womankind's recent clients, your constituents, and individuals who need our help.

Today, I ask we find our way to work together to **center our survivors**, and the many organizations whose staff tirelessly working support those in need. Today, we ask you to join as champions of our important work, and ensure that timely decisions and actions directly align with your commitment to ending gender based violence. We must hold ourselves accounting to the roles, opportunities, and privileges we have to be in these position here today. The survivor community is relying on us.



My name is Niketa Sheth, I am a survivor, and the CEO of Womankind. For 38 years, Womankind, formerly New York Asian Women's Center has helped countless Asian survivors of domestic violence, sexual violence and human trafficking. 75% of our survivors are immigrants. Our average client is a 35-year old Asian woman with limited English proficiency, supporting two children with a family income of \$15,000 or less.

During this pandemic, Womankind's staff has been served hundreds of new survivors while managing increased needs of existing survivor clients. For example, our helpline and chat with language capacity of 18+ different languages and allows us to step into different roles at critical moments of safety. Just weeks ago, we were supporting a woman who called for support. During the call, she experienced a threat and needed to drop the call but asked us to call 911 on her behalf. In that moment, she did not have time to place a 911 call and was concerned about her inability to speak English. It's important to remember that survivors who have limited or no English proficiency and/or are undocumented are far less likely to call 911. Culturally specific organizations, like Womankind serve as your partners.

At this critical time, we are continually reminded that the obstacles survivors face are beyond the violence itself. Some survivors face poverty, homelessness and starvation. Others are undocumented and face the fear of deportation. Many survivors are unaware their rights and resources due to language barriers. Most have children to care for, feed and support, yet lost their jobs and are also struggling with their own anxiety and mental health.

On May 1<sup>st</sup>, CNN reported an alarming disproportionate rise in unemployment claims from Asian-Americans which have spiked 6,900% in New York. "Across New York, that's a 6,900% increase — by far the largest percentage increase experienced by any one racial or ethnic group. In contrast, claims were up 1,840% for white workers, 1,260% for black workers, and 2,100% for Hispanic and Latino workers in New York." Prior to Covid-19, we know that 25% of Asians live in poverty, the highest ethnic-racial group across NYC. In recent months, Womankind has seen a significant number of needs by Asian survivors of violence.

**Three asks of City Council:**

1) We respectfully request that Womankind is recommended as a possible recipient of the Mayor's Fund for support to undocumented individuals with cash assistance. This fund by invite only, yet is intended to support some of the most vulnerable communities in NYC.

Womankind is also raising funds to directly support our survivor community with emergency assistance, while also struggling to ensure we as an agency can keep its financial stability. We look to partner with the city to ensure more survivors do not enter into poverty and homelessness.

2) We are relying on City Council to address is Council discretionary funding. We understand this may be difficult. We hope you can see that cuts to discretionary funding



creates an equity issue and will have a damaging impact on smaller organizations and those serving immigrant communities.

Like many others, Womankind is 85% funded from government support. Our 38 years of practice and 75 staff makes us best in the field to support Asian survivors and their families communities. The city and its contingents rely on us, and we also reply on you. We urge you to see that domestic violence organizations need 100% commitment of contracts in order to survive this challenging time. We implore you ensure city funding to our essential workers remains a priority.

3) Invite Womankind and other culturally specific providers to join City Council as solutions are being considered. By inviting organizations to inform members in advance, it will allow for more timely and viable solutions. We believe there is a vital need for the city to offer swift solutions around the lack of culturally specific food options to vulnerable communities, tenant rights and options for those facing eviction, and continued efforts to reduce hate crimes and the anti- Asian sentiment impacting individuals and Asian owned businesses.

Finally, we hope that the city can urge key decision makers at the state level to ensure domestic violence providers running shelters are offered 100% reimbursement of contracts offered regardless of occupancy rates. This collective ask has been made by several domestic violence coalitions. We can use the support of City Council.

We look forward to working with the City to identify solutions to support the needs of domestic violence survivors. Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have, and I can be reached at [nsheth@iamwk.org](mailto:nsheth@iamwk.org) or 856-383-2600.

Respectfully,

Niketa Sheth, CEO  
Womankind

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Referenced data and statistics:

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/01/economy/unemployment-benefits-new-york-asian-americans/index.html>

<http://www.cacf.org/>



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May 5, 2020

Honorable Chairwoman Rosenthal  
Committee on Women and Gender Equity  
Committee on Public Safety  
New York City Council  
New York, NY

Re: Oversight Hearing - The Impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on Domestic  
Violence in New York City (May 1, 2020)

Dear Honorable Chairwoman Rosenthal

Thank you, Chair Rosenthal and other members of the Committee on Women and Gender Equity and the Committee on Public Safety, for convening this hearing and for providing me the opportunity to submit testimony on this important issue.

My name is Julie Goldscheid. I am a professor at CUNY Law School, the only public law school in New York City and one of the most diverse law schools in the country. CUNY Law School was founded in 1985 with the mission of training public interest lawyers. The views expressed here are my own, and not the views of the law school.

For over 30 years, I have advocated on behalf of survivors of gender-based violence, including intimate partner and sexual violence. Before joining the CUNY Law School faculty, I was General Counsel at Safe Horizon, and before that, I was a senior staff attorney and acting legal director at Legal Momentum (formerly NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund), where I spearheaded the organization's litigation, legislation and policy efforts to address gender violence. I applaud the City Council's efforts to address the particular needs of survivors of intimate partner violence in the wake of the COVID-19 epidemic.

I submit this testimony to commend the Council's longstanding support of social service and community-based programs providing counseling, safety planning, civil legal services, housing and other critical assistance to people navigating violence in their relationships, and to urge its continued and expanded support for those and similar programs in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup> The City Council's recently launched "#BeingSafeCANTWait social media campaign promises to play an important role in spreading awareness of intimate partner violence

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<sup>1</sup> I gratefully acknowledge Tycel Harris, CUNY Law '21, Katie Massey, CUNY Law '21, and Rashika A. Rakibullah, CUNY Law '21, for their invaluable research assistance in preparing this testimony.

amid COVID-19 and letting affected people know that help is available.<sup>2</sup> As we build our responses to the pandemic, we should carefully calibrate responses to address as closely as possible survivors' needs and the underlying causes of intimate partner violence. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed fractures in our social safety net. It has highlighted the problems with our reliance on criminal legal responses to social problems. It is more important than ever to support community-based organizations and social services, such as counseling, safety planning, civil legal services, childcare and housing, as well as initiatives that address the underlying sources of economic and other forms of inequality that fuel violence and abuse.

A. The COVID-19 pandemic, like other natural disasters and economic downturns, increases the risk of intimate partner violence.

As many have recognized, the COVID-19 pandemic and associated orders directing New Yorkers and others to stay at home,<sup>3</sup> increase the risk of violence for those living with abusive partners.<sup>4</sup> Global reports from countries that have tracked the incidence of intimate partner violence as COVID takes its toll report dramatic increases.<sup>5</sup> These increases mirror documented trends following other similar crises, such as the 2008 recession and Hurricane Katrina.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> NY City Council, *Speaker Corey Johnson, Women & Gender Equity Chair Helen Rosenthal and Public Safety Chair Donovan Richards Announce Social Media Campaign to Raise Awareness About Domestic Violence During COVID-19*, <https://council.nyc.gov/press/2020/05/01/1945/>.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., New York State on Pause, <https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/new-york-state-pause>; City of New York, NYC COVID-19 Citywide Information Portal, available at <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/coronavirus/index.page>.

<sup>4</sup> See Ashley Abramson, *How COVID-19 may increase domestic violence and child abuse*, APA, Apr. 8, 2020, <https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/domestic-violence-child-abuse>; Mélissa Godin, *As Cities Around the World Go on Lockdown, Victims of Domestic Violence Look for a Way Out*, TIME, Mar. 18, 2020, <https://time.com/5803887/coronavirus-domestic-violence-victims/>; Liz Ford, 'Calamitous': domestic violence set to soar by 20% during global lockdown, The Guardian, Apr. 28, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/28/calamitous-domestic-violence-set-to-soar-by-20-during-global-lockdown-coronavirus>; Alisha Haridasani Gupta & Aviva Stahl, *For Abused Women, a Pandemic Lockdown Holds Dangers of Its Own*, NY Times, Mar. 24, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/24/us/coronavirus-lockdown-domestic-violence.html>; Ashley Southall, *Why a Drop in Domestic Violence Reports Might Not Be a Good Sign*, NY Times, Apr. 17, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/17/nyregion/new-york-city-domestic-violence-coronavirus.html>; see also, e.g., UNFPA, *Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Family Planning and Ending Gender-based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage*, Apr. 27, 2020, [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID-19\\_impact\\_brief\\_for\\_UNFPA\\_24\\_April\\_2020\\_1.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID-19_impact_brief_for_UNFPA_24_April_2020_1.pdf) (warning that COVID-19 could undermine efforts to end gender-based violence and will increase the incidence of violence).

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, *China's domestic violence epidemic*, Axios, Mar. 7, 2020, <https://www.axios.com/china-domestic-violence-coronavirus-quarantine-7b00c3ba-35bc-4d16-afdd-b76ecfb2882.html> (tracking data from China); Andrew M. Campbell, *An increasing risk of family violence during the Covid-19 pandemic: Strengthening community collaborations to save lives*, *Forensic Science Int'l.: Reports*, Apr. 12, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7152912/> (collecting reports, for example, that domestic violence tripled in China during its shelter in place mandate; that France indicated a 30% increase; Brazil estimates a 40-50% increase; and of dramatic increases in Italy and Spain as well).

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Gupta & Stahl, *supra* note 4 (discussing impact of disasters on domestic violence generally); Daniel Schneider, *Intimate Partner Violence in the Great Recession*, NCBI, Apr. 1, 2017, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4860387/> (finding unemployment and economic hardship positively related to abusive behavior); Julie A. Schumacher, et al., *Intimate partner violence and Hurricane Katrina: Predictors and associated mental health outcomes*, NCBI, Jul. 11, 2012, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3394178/> (tracing increased prevalence of intimate partner violence following Hurricane Katrina).

The rise in intimate partner violence associated with COVID-19 also tracks the rise in violence and abuse associated with economic downturns and dislocation.<sup>7</sup> Given the devastating economic impact of the pandemic, we can expect the problem to intensify. Studies predating this pandemic have demonstrated that neighborhood economic instability increases the risk of intimate partner violence.<sup>8</sup> That data underscores the importance of policies addressing economic inequality as a violence prevention strategy. A holistic and comprehensive response to intimate partner violence should address its economic causes and consequences. This includes structural economic supports, safe employment opportunities, childcare and housing. To build resilience and capacity for the long term, prevention programs, such as community-based programs operating throughout the city, should receive enthusiastic support.

B. Responses should continue and enhance support for community-based and social service programs, as many survivors will not seek contact with law enforcement.

While some people impacted by intimate partner violence will seek assistance from law enforcement, it is important to take into account the reasons many survivors will not turn to law enforcement for help. In recent years, policy-makers increasingly have recognized that criminal law will not solve social problems, and that instead, it all too often harms both individuals and communities.<sup>9</sup> This is true with respect to intimate partner violence as well.<sup>10</sup> As advocates and domestic violence scholars Leigh Goodmark and Aya Gruber recently recognized, “turning to criminalization will often not stop and could even increase the violence.”<sup>11</sup>

Survivors and advocates cite significant concerns associated with calling law enforcement. For example, a national study of callers to the National Domestic Violence Hotline found that both women who had called the police and women who hadn’t called the police shared a strong reluctance to turning to law enforcement for help: a quarter of women who had called police to report domestic violence or sexual assault would not call again in the future, and 80% of those who had not previously called the police were somewhat or extremely afraid to call them in the future.<sup>12</sup> Callers cited reasons such as fear of retaliation from the abuser or his friends and relatives, or fear that the abuser would get a slap on the wrist, or would eventually be

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<sup>7</sup> See Deborah Weissman, *To Reimagine Intervention Strategies: The Political Economy of Domestic Violence, Law & Political Economy*, July 2, 2019, <https://lpeblog.org/2019/07/02/to-reimagine-intervention-strategies-the-political-economy-of-domestic-violence/#more-2626>.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., NIJ, *Economic Distress and Intimate Partner Violence*, Jan. 4, 2009 (<https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/economic-distress-and-intimate-partner-violence>) (linking to studies showing that financial strain, unemployment and living in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods can impact rates and severity of intimate partner violence).

<sup>9</sup> For a few leading examples of scholarship criticizing mass incarceration, see, e.g., MICHELLE ALEXANDER, *THE NEW JIM CROW, MASS INCARCERATION IN THE AGE OF COLORBLINDNESS* (2010); JAMES FORMAN JR. *LOCKING UP OUR OWN: CRIME AND PUNISHMENT IN BLACK AMERICA* (2017); DANIELLE SERED, *UNTIL WE RECKON, VIOLENCE, MASS INCARCERATION, AND A ROAD TO REPAIR* (2019); BRYAN STEVENSON, *JUST MERCY: A STORY OF JUSTICE AND REDEMPTION* (2015).

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., LEIGH GOODMARK, *DECRIMINALIZING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: A BALANCED POLICY APPROACH TO INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE* 5 (2018) (critiquing criminal legal responses to domestic violence).

<sup>11</sup> Aya Gruber & Leigh Goodmark, *Domestic violence is also a virus: During the coronavirus crisis, we need the right criminal justice response to the crime*, NY Daily News, Mar. 26, 2020, <https://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/ny-20200326-gydz22wcraptezg34wvyic3ma-story.html>.

<sup>12</sup> T.K. Logan & Rob (Roberta) Valente, *WHO WILL HELP ME? Domestic Violence Survivors Speak Out About Law Enforcement Responses*, National Domestic Violence Hotline (2015), <http://www.thehotline.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/09/NDVH-2015-Law-Enforcement-Survey-Report.pdf>.

released, and then she will have angered him and will be in even more danger.<sup>13</sup> They cited fear of getting arrested themselves.<sup>14</sup> They cited fear that the police would be violent, either against the offender or against other people in the home, especially those with mental disabilities, and cited the risk of negative consequences for the offender.<sup>15</sup>

A similar national survey of service providers also detailed clients' reluctance to call law enforcement.<sup>16</sup> Advocates cited client's concerns, including police hostility, dismissiveness, and bias towards survivors based on race, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and religion.<sup>17</sup> They provided examples of harmful collateral effects resulting from criminal justice system involvement, such as: the risk of deportation for themselves or undocumented family members; involvement with child protection agencies potentially leading to loss of custody of children; and economic consequences such as losing the sole source of income for the family or housing, employment, or welfare benefits.<sup>18</sup> Service providers also observed that the criminal justice process is lengthy, complicated, focused on punishment and separation from the abuser, and outside the survivor's control.<sup>19</sup> As advocates know well, survivors want the violence to stop, but often do not want the abuser to be sent to jail. Advocates highlight the need for services that help survivors identify and evaluate options, and that rely on survivors' judgement about the path that will best balance safety.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to these longstanding concerns about criminal legal responses, responses that would send people to jail or prison are particularly dangerous during this pandemic. Jails and prisons have emerged as hot spots for COVID-19 infections in New York City and throughout the country.<sup>21</sup> This means that if individuals who commit acts of intimate partner violence are sent to jail or prison, they risk returning and infecting family and community members. This danger makes enhanced support for non-criminal community-based programs all the more important for everyone, including survivors and their families.

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<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> ACLU et al, *Responses from the Field: Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, and Policing* (2015), [https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field\\_document/2015.10.20\\_report\\_-\\_responses\\_from\\_the\\_field.pdf](https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/2015.10.20_report_-_responses_from_the_field.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> See Center for Court Innovation, *A National Portrait of Restorative Approaches to Intimate Partner Violence: Pathways to Safety, Accountability, Healing, and Well-Being* (Oct. 2019), [https://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2019/Report\\_IPV\\_11262019.pdf](https://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2019/Report_IPV_11262019.pdf); Jill Crowner, *Why Survivors Don't Call the Police*, Break the Cycle, Apr. 23, 2019, <https://breakthesilencedv.org/why-survivors-dont-call-the-police/>.

<sup>21</sup> See Miranda Bryant, *Coronavirus spread at Rikers is a 'public health disaster', says jail's top doctor*, The Guardian, Apr. 1, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/apr/01/rikers-island-jail-coronavirus-public-health-disaster>; Andrew Denney, *Coronavirus cases surge at NYC's lone privately run jail*, NY Post, Apr. 22, 2020, <https://nypost.com/2020/04/22/coronavirus-cases-surge-at-nycs-lone-privately-run-jail/>; German Lopez, *Why US jails and prisons became coronavirus epicenters*, Vox, Apr. 22, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/2020/4/22/21228146/coronavirus-pandemic-jails-prisons-epicenters>; Jan Ransom & Alan Feuer, *'We're Left for Dead': Fears of Virus Catastrophe at Rikers Jail*, NY Times Mar. 30, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/30/nyregion/coronavirus-rikers-nyc-jail.html>; Jon Schuppe, *Prisoners in New York City jails sound alarm as coronavirus spreads: 'I fear for my life'*, NBC NEWS, Mar. 30, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/prisoners-new-york-city-jails-sound-alarm-coronavirus-spreads-i-n1172306>.

Moreover, concerns with turning to the criminal legal system are exacerbated during this time of increased surveillance and punishment of immigrant communities. Seeking any form of governmental assistance has become increasingly dangerous amidst reports of aggressive efforts to detain and deport those who are undocumented, including reports of federal agents detaining survivors seeking help in court.<sup>22</sup> These fears have made coping with abuse or other forms of trauma in the midst of the pandemic all the more challenging for those in immigrant communities.<sup>23</sup>

### Conclusion

I applaud the Council for its efforts to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on those coping with intimate partner violence, including the Council's support for community-based programs and organizations that are working with survivors and their families. The data on the economic causes of intimate partner violence, the importance of prevention programs, and the limitations of criminal legal responses make those programs, which provide counseling, safety planning, civil legal services, housing, childcare, education and prevention, all the more important in the weeks, months and years to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony and for your concern for these important issues. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Respectfully,

Julie Goldscheid  
Professor of Law

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<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., Rebecca Tan, *Amid immigration crackdown, undocumented abuse victims hesitate to come forward*, The Washington Post, June 30, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/amid-immigration-crackdown-undocumented-abuse-victims-hesitate-to-come-forward/2019/06/30/3cb2c816-9840-11e9-830a-21b9b36b64ad\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/amid-immigration-crackdown-undocumented-abuse-victims-hesitate-to-come-forward/2019/06/30/3cb2c816-9840-11e9-830a-21b9b36b64ad_story.html) (citing surveys of legal advocates and attorneys detailing immigrant survivors' fears of interacting with federal officials in any way, due to heightened threats of deportation).

<sup>23</sup> Tahirih Justice Center, *The Impact of COVID-19 on Immigrant Survivors of Gender-Based Violence*, Mar. 23, 2020, [https://www.tahirih.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Impact-of-Social-Distancing-on-Immigrant-Survivors-of-Gender-Based-Violence\\_Final-March-23-2020.pdf](https://www.tahirih.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Impact-of-Social-Distancing-on-Immigrant-Survivors-of-Gender-Based-Violence_Final-March-23-2020.pdf).