

**Testimony Of The New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
To The Joint Budget Hearing Of The Senate Finance Committee  
And Assembly Ways And Means Committee  
Regarding Public Protection**

**Testimony Presented by Joan Gerhardt, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy  
February 12, 2020**

My name is Joan Gerhardt and I am the Director of Public Policy and Advocacy at the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NYSCADV). On behalf of NYSCADV, I want to thank Senator Krueger and Assemblymember Weinstein and committee members for the opportunity to convey comments regarding the budget and public protection issues as they impact victims of domestic violence in New York.

The New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence was established 40 years ago as a statewide non-profit membership organization comprised of local domestic violence service providers and allied organizations who are committed to preventing and ending domestic violence. In New York, there are nearly 100 residential and non-residential domestic violence programs which serve nearly 52,000 survivors of domestic violence and their children each year.

The purpose of our organization is to serve as an information clearinghouse, primary point of contact and resource center on domestic violence for the State of New York. We also provide education, support and technical assistance to domestic violence service providers; and support the development of policies, protocols and procedures to enhance domestic violence intervention and prevention.

**FOR 4 YEARS IN A ROW, NEW YORK HAS HAD THE HIGHEST DEMAND  
FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES IN THE COUNTRY**

According to an annual census conducted by our national partner, the National Network to End Domestic Violence, **New York State has had the highest demand for domestic violence services in the country, now four years in a row.**

The National Census provides a one day, unduplicated count of adults and children seeking services from domestic violence programs in all states and the U.S. territories. **Data from the most recent Census indicate that:**

- On one day alone in New York in 2018, 7,518 victims of domestic violence received services.
- On that same day, 801 requests for domestic violence services went unmet in New York because of critical funding and staffing shortages at local domestic violence agencies.

- And over the course of the past four years, 313 domestic violence program positions across New York were reduced or eliminated.

Simply put, we are losing ground. While New York’s demand for domestic violence services is increasing, funding for these services is either non-existent, decreasing or flat. Domestic violence programs do their best to provide all of the “emergency core services” they are mandated to provide. However, many DV programs are barely getting by financially and making difficult decisions regarding how to continue providing high-quality, trauma-informed services with the funding available to them.

If New York State wants to ensure domestic violence services are sufficient to address the growing need, it is critical for New York to make a meaningful investment in domestic violence services and primary prevention in our state.

## **PRIORITIES IN THE FY’20-’21 NEW YORK STATE BUDGET FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES**

New York State’s support for domestic violence survivors is at a critical juncture. Last year, the Governor and Legislature took an important step and eliminated the requirement that survivors seeking shelter apply for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families assistance, or TANF. In addition, changes to New York State Statute were made to ensure domestic violence survivors were not charged fees for emergency shelter and other services.

However, this was just a first step to bring New York State into compliance with federal regulations. Much more is needed to modernize the State’s antiquated domestic violence service delivery system to ensure victims receive the support they need to keep themselves and their families safe.

New York’s domestic violence service delivery system has not been updated since it was established more than 30 years ago. Then, a majority of domestic violence victims sought emergency shelter. Today, domestic violence victims are in need of a much wider range of services and are not necessarily looking to leave their homes or their communities. New York’s domestic violence service delivery and funding model must evolve to be responsive to what domestic violence victims need today and into the future.

As NYSCADV works with domestic violence advocates around the State, with the Governor and Legislature, and with our State Agency partners, we are advocating for several budgetary priorities this year, including the following:

### **1. Create the Strongest Statewide Network of Domestic Violence Services in the Country by Implementing a New Funding Structure for DV Programs**

The Governor’s FY’20-’21 Executive Budget includes \$5 million in the Aid to Localities budget to pilot a new flexible funding model that reduces the barriers and challenges for domestic violence service providers assisting survivors. Transforming New York’s antiquated domestic violence service delivery system is critical to ensuring victims and their families receive the support they need immediately and without conditions. The Governor’s proposal is based on foundational work

conducted by the Governor's DV Task Force and is a critical first step for the State to transition to an innovative, survivor-centered service delivery system.

However, the Executive Budget does not contain any detail pertaining to how such a pilot program will be conducted. For example, we are uncertain which state-required domestic violence emergency core services will be supported with the available funding, as well as the duration of the pilot program. While it is impossible for NYSCADV to ascertain whether a \$5 million allocation for the pilot program is sufficient, we wholeheartedly support this pilot program, recognizing it to be the next step to transform New York's antiquated system of providing domestic violence services to those who need them.

## **2) Increase Funding for Non-Residential Domestic Violence Services**

New York's non-residential DV services, such as hotlines, information and referral services, counseling, legal advocacy and financial empowerment, are funded by a combination of Family Violence and Prevention Services Act (FVPSA) funding and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding, both federal grants that flow into New York's coffers.

Recently, domestic violence service providers were informed of their level of FVPSA funding over the next five-year grant period. While most programs will see the same or increased levels of funding, some will experience significant cuts. For example, **funding for one downstate program was cut 75%. Another upstate, rural program received cuts totaling \$284,000.** These funding cuts were implemented without advance warning, so domestic violence programs were left with little to no time to identify alternate sources of funding to ensure the stability of their service provision.

NYSCADV has been informed that it is likely these cuts, if not rectified, will result in reduced programming and elimination of staff positions. In fact, one service provider is not confident it will be able to offer any domestic violence services going forward.

It is unacceptable for any domestic violence program in New York State to have its funding decreased. These cuts will substantially impair New York's safety net for domestic violence victims and we respectfully urge the Legislature to make emergency funding available to ensure these programs can maintain staffing levels and their non-residential supports for victims.

Non-residential domestic violence services are also funded with a dedicated stream of \$3 million in TANF funding. These funds flow from the federal government into New York State and out to local Departments of Social Services (DSSs). Local DSSs then enter into contracts with local domestic violence service providers for non-residential services, or offer non-residential DV services themselves.

The level of dedicated TANF funding for non-residential DV services — \$3 million — is at the same level as when it was first proposed 20 years ago in the FY'00-'01 budget. NYSCADV urges the State to increase to \$6 million the federal TANF set-aside for non-residential services.

## **3) Implement Statewide Primary Prevention Programming**

Domestic violence is a serious, widespread public health issue that impacts individuals, families, the workforce and communities. It can happen to anyone, and does happen to people of every age,

race, gender, sexual orientation, income and occupation. In fact, for every 20 New Yorkers, five women and three men will experience or have already experienced domestic violence. And, as stated above, New York State has had the highest demand for domestic violence services in the country for four years in a row.

New York can, and must, invest in efforts to stop domestic violence from happening in the first place. This is called primary prevention, and it aims to change behaviors and cultural norms in society that enable domestic violence to be tolerated and normalized. Primary prevention offers strategic solutions toward fostering healthy, thriving futures for families and communities – futures where domestic violence does not occur. Primary prevention programs create lasting change by re-setting the conditions in a community that allow domestic violence to thrive.

From 2002-2013, NYSCADV received funding from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to establish and lead a statewide primary prevention effort. Called the Domestic Violence Prevention Enhancement and Leadership Through Alliance (DELTA) program, the project sought to reduce the incidence (e.g., the number of new cases) of intimate partner violence (IPV) across the State. Working within local Coordinated Community Response teams, the program sought to engage youth, men and diverse community partners in identifying and removing the factors that contribute to domestic violence.

Unfortunately, since the federal DELTA project ended in 2013, no federal or state funding has been available to pick up where the DELTA project left off.

Last year, the Governor’s DV Task Force concluded, “Through the implementation of primary and secondary prevention strategies and programs that are community based, culturally responsive and evidence-based, fewer women and men will be victims of domestic violence... Prevention must begin with children as young as toddlers, and carried out through adulthood. Programs aimed at enhancing awareness and developing healthy relationships, recognizing that domestic violence impacts all genders, income levels, ethnicities and ages, are the first step in primary prevention.”

NYSCADV was therefore surprised that, as in the past, **Governor Cuomo’s FY’20-’21 Executive Budget did not allocate any funding for primary prevention efforts.** NYSCADV respectfully urges the State Legislature to re-energize NYSCADV’s statewide primary prevention effort with a budgetary allocation of \$4 million. The earlier DELTA plan can serve as a blueprint for a long-term undertaking with enormous benefits to all New Yorkers, and will place New York State at the forefront of the dialogue about domestic violence prevention across the country.

#### **4. Provide Critical Funding for Statewide Coordination Efforts to Ensure the Voices of Domestic Violence Survivors and Advocates are Heard**

This year, Governor Cuomo and the Legislature will be contemplating momentous changes to the way New York provides services to domestic violence victims. With a system of such great value and importance — one that impacts the lives of thousands of New Yorkers — we must get it right at the outset. This is a tremendous opportunity, but we must take care to ensure that we don’t fix the current broken system with one that won’t ease the challenges for survivors and advocates.

The Legislature can ensure a better, more efficient and enhanced domestic violence service delivery system by hearing directly from domestic violence survivors and advocates throughout the reform process. As the voice of New York’s domestic violence programs, NYSCADV is in a prime position to assist the Legislature during its deliberations. However, unlike many of our peer

domestic violence coalitions across the country, we do not receive significant state funding for the work that we do on behalf of New Yorkers. As a result, NYSCADV's staffing capacity and revenues are well below that of other similarly-situated domestic violence coalitions.

One of the main duties of statewide domestic violence coalitions like NYSCADV is to provide education, support and technical assistance to domestic violence service providers to enable them to provide innovative shelter and supportive services for victims of domestic violence and their dependents. Each year, NYSCADV offers multiple training opportunities and technical assistance to DV service providers and allied organizations on topics such as trauma-informed, victim-centered service provision and program development; laws and regulations and their impact on service provision; cultural competency; analysis of special considerations for historically marginalized communities; community collaboration; and housing options for survivors. With NYSCADV's current staffing capacity, we cannot satisfy all the requests we receive from DV service providers for training and technical assistance, or from the Legislature and State Agencies for advice and counsel on policy, legislative and regulatory changes.

We are asking the Legislature to provide \$150,000 of state funding in the State Budget to enable NYSCADV to represent the voice of domestic violence providers and survivors to the State, and to enhance its training and technical assistance capacity for local domestic violence service providers.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Since our current system of domestic violence services was established in New York over 30 years ago, we have made some progress in the State's response to domestic violence. However, we have also experienced an increasing demand for domestic violence services across the State, and we have failed to change the fact that New York State has the highest demand for DV services in the country. We therefore still have much work in front of us to ensure no one who is seeking domestic violence services is ever turned away.

I urge you to implement strategies within the budget to ensure survivors and their families receive the supports they need. The Legislature must value the lifesaving work of advocates in a way that the State has not done before. Quite simply, if we are not able to reach these goals, we will continue to see tragedies across our State.

In the midst of the challenges and barriers we face, together we can do the right thing for survivors and advocates.

NYSCADV looks forward to working with you on these issues, and I want to thank you again for the opportunity to present this testimony.