



End Domestic Violence

NEW YORK STATE SENATE

Report on a Joint Public Hearing of the Standing Committees on Social Services and Women's Issues:

Services for Survivors of Gender-Based and Domestic Violence

Tuesday, October 3, 2023
Albany, New York



Senator Roxanne J. Persaud
Chair
Social Services Committee



Senator Lea Webb
Chair
Women's Issues Committee

CHAIR
SOCIAL SERVICES
COMMITTEES
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
CITIES I
CODES
DISABILITIES
TRANSPORTATION
WOMEN'S ISSUES

NEW YORK
STATE
SENATE



SENATOR ROXANNE J. PERSAUD
19TH SENATE DISTRICT

PLEASE RESPOND TO:
 ALBANY OFFICE:
ROOM 409 LOB
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12247
518-455-2788
FAX: 518-426-6806
 DISTRICT OFFICE:
1222 EAST 96TH STREET
BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11236
718-649-7653
FAX: 718-649-7661
 EMAIL:
PERSAUD@NYSENATE.GOV

November 30, 2023

The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Temporary President and Majority Leader
New York State Senate
Albany, New York 12247

Dear Leader Stewart-Cousins:

We are pleased to transmit this Report of the New York State Senate Standing Committees on Social Services and Women's Issues for our Joint-Public Hearing held on Tuesday, October 3, 2023. The hearing convened human services agencies, advocates, and service providers to examine whether the current continuum of care meets the needs of survivors of gender-based and domestic violence. We are proud to lead efforts to address important matters pertaining to services and supports for survivors of gender-based and domestic violence, along with the human services agencies and workforce that provide continued care to survivors in New York State every day. This report includes helpful observations and recommendations from the witnesses that we look forward to discussing with our colleagues to further enhance and protect services for this vulnerable population.

We thank the witnesses that provided important testimony and their continued support of survivors in New York State. We appreciate the support from the Majority Conference in convening this critical and timely discussion.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Roxanne J. Persaud in black ink.

Roxanne J. Persaud

Handwritten signature of Lea Webb in black ink.

Lea Webb

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The New York State Senate Social Services Committee, chaired by Senator Roxanne J. Persaud, and the Women's Issues Committee, chaired by Senator Lea Webb, convened a joint public hearing on Tuesday, October 3, 2023, in Albany. The hearing was convened to examine whether the current continuum of care is meeting the needs of survivors of gender-based and domestic violence (DV). Pertinent human services agencies, advocates, and domestic violence service providers were invited to provide testimony.

Verbal testimony was given by the following:

- NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence - *Kelli Owens, Executive Director*
- NYS Office of Children & Family Services - *Suzanne Miles-Gustave, Esq., Acting Commissioner*
- NYS Coalition Against Domestic Violence - *Joan Gerhardt, Director of Public Policy & Advocacy*
- Crime Victims Assistance Center - *Christine Battisti, CEO*
- Empire Justice Center - *Remla Parthasarathy, Managing Attorney - Crime Victims (Virtual)*
- New Hour for Women & Children - *Serena Martin-Liguori, Executive Director (Virtual)*
- Her Justice, Inc. - *Hamra Ahmad, Director of Law & Policy*
- Safe Horizon - *Jimmy Meagher, Policy Director - Government Affairs*
- Sanctuary for Families - *Laura Fernandez, LMSW, Senior Director - Clinical Services*
- Child & Family Services - *Tiffany Pavone, JD, Director of Victim Services*

Written-only testimony was submitted by the following:

- The Council of the City of New York - *Tiffany Cabán, Chair of the Women & Gender Equity Committee*
- New York Legal Assistance Group - *Amanda M. Beltz, Esq., Director of Domestic Violence Law Unit*
- The New York Legal Services Coalition
- Services for the Underserved - *Perry Perlmutter, CEO & President*
- Center for Elder Law & Justice - *Karen L. Nicolson, Chief Executive Officer*

Each in-person witness was designated ten minutes to discuss the services provided by their agency or organization and the barriers they face in working to protect and uplift survivors. Testimony was then followed by questions from both Senator Persaud and Senator Webb.

The governmental and non-governmental witnesses spotlighted many shared issues throughout their in-person testimony and written testimony submissions. Common themes were the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding, staffing shortages and retention, Human Services Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA), and shortcomings with legal services and programmatic services contracts.

NON-EXHAUSTIVE SUMMARY OF WITNESS OBSERVATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Address the federal Victim of Crimes Act (VOCA) funding shortfall.

Although VOCA funding allocated to New York State falls outside the purview of the Social Services and Women's Issues Committees, all witnesses described how reduced federal funding and the resulting cuts to state-contracted providers will negatively and drastically impact victims, survivors, and programs within New York's continuum of care. Federal VOCA funding has declined by \$121.6 million over the past five years.

Improve Services & Support for Survivors

- Greater access to safe, permanent, affordable housing is needed.
- Invest in single adult DV shelters.
- Provide micro-grant funding for survivors to obtain and retain housing.
- Hotline services across the DV provider sector need additional staffing to provide timely care and referrals to survivors in their most vulnerable times.

Fairly Compensate the Non-Profit Human Services Workforce

- A living wage for human services workers is the State's responsibility, yet current State contracts do not provide for living wages.
- Include "domestic violence advocates" and related workers in State COLA.
- Contractual compensation levels do not reflect education requirements nor recognize a high incidence of occupational vicarious trauma.

Support New York's Non-Profit Human Services Provider Sector

- Non-profit service providers struggle to recruit and retain trauma-informed and culturally competent staff due to undervalued contractual rates of pay.
- Reform New York's DV shelter per-diem reimbursement methodology to 1) pay favorable rates for single adult stays and 2) compensate providers for shelter service availability regardless of daily occupancy rates.

Reform New York State's Multi-agency, Competitive Contracting and Reimbursement Model

- DV-related programmatic funds are dispersed through several State agencies that separately allocate funds to providers based on competitive procurement.
- Providers have five-six or more contracts with different amounts, time frames, and record-keeping/audit processes.

Further Invest in Legal Services that Continue to Meet Unique Needs of Survivors

- There is significant need for long-term, flexible funding contracts for legal services supporting survivors in contested divorce proceedings. The out-of-pocket cost of representation is inaccessible and unattainable for survivors.
- Witnesses argue that current State contracts don't account for the fact that court cases can take years to resolve.
- Victims and survivors require trauma-informed, culturally competent, and sensitive attorneys with high levels of training and nuanced skill sets.
- Victims and survivors without citizenship require specialized legal representation unique to individual circumstances.
- There is significant need for multilingual legal support to meet the growing multicultural DV and gender-based violence survivor population.



HIGHLIGHTS OF VERBAL TESTIMONY GIVEN IN-PERSON OR VIRTUALLY

(In order of appearance)

NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV)

Testimony was provided by Kelli Owens, Executive Director. Owens explained how OPDV's three pillars - (1) survivor-centered, (2) trauma-informed, and (3) culturally responsive care - guide their service delivery systems and all stakeholders who interact with survivors. OPDV stated they are the only executive-level agency dedicated to Domestic Violence in the country. They administer \$4.5 million in sexual assault funding through the "Enough is Enough" program on college campuses throughout the State to prevent and respond to incidents of domestic violence on campus. OPDV has overseen the expansion of a statewide hotline to include additional means of contact such as a text and website chatline to connect victims and survivors with resources. Senator Persaud inquired about the estimated volume of calls OPDV's hotline receives. Owens replied that the Office receives around 8,000 calls, but added that most direct hotline outreach occurs locally.

Owens shared that OPDV has set up a way to hear directly from stakeholders by creating Domestic Violence Regional Councils (DVRC) to better problem solve, collaborate, and make public policy recommendations. Furthermore, OPDV has conducted survivor listening sessions to ensure State agencies and stakeholders hear directly from survivors. Owens spoke to the work of OPDV under Governor Hochul's Executive Order No. 17, which has resulted in 70,000 trained State employees since 2022.

Even with these strides, Owens stressed that the current shelter and emergency-based system doesn't work for most victims and survivors dealing with sexual assault, domestic violence, and gender-based violence. "The system that we've built has really left out a lot of voices and has told people what to do, where to live, and how to find safety," Owens said. This current system, she alluded, needs funding. Flexible spending funds, she continued, would "help achieve financial and housing stability for survivors and ensure survivors remain safe and economically stable at a time when they need it the most; increased investments are needed in the coming years to allow for long-term system change."

NYS Office of Children & Family Services (OCFS)

Testimony was given by Acting Commissioner Suzanne Miles-Gustave, Esq. OCFS oversees programs provided through local social services districts, both residential and non-residential, providing shelter as well as other services to survivors of domestic and gender-based violence. The Acting Commissioner outlined that "there are currently a total of 183 residential facilities across the State, with a total bed capacity of 3,274. For (their) most recent federal

reporting period, October 1, 2021 through September 30, 2022, more than 48,000 people overall received domestic violence services. This includes more than 11,000 survivors served in shelters and nearly 37,000 served by non-residential programs. Of those service recipients who responded to surveys provided by DV programs, a total of 92% reported knowing more about available community services, and 95% reported knowing more ways to plan for safety after receiving domestic violence services.”

Suzanne Miles-Gustave, Esq. further testified that there are numerous challenges faced by both domestic violence and gender-based violence survivors and providers, which she outlined as such:

- **Financial abuse** - This is a way for abusers to control their victims and leave them in debt without the means to apply for a job or open a bank account.
 - OCFS shared that in 2020, the Allstate Foundation provided New York State with a grant for the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NYSCADV) to develop financial empowerment tools for victims and survivors.
- **Housing** - Suzanne Miles-Gustave, Esq. explained that the lack of affordable housing is a complex issue encompassing the lack of affordable units, the lack of units within reach of public transportation, and the lack of funding for long-term assistance.
- **Access to legal services.** The legal services available to victims and survivors, Suzanne Miles-Gustave, Esq., said, “is more about helping survivors understand their legal options, paperwork needed and how the system works.” It does not provide legal advice or representation.
- **Mental Health support** - Suzanne Miles-Gustave, Esq. suggests that trauma-informed care and counseling services are a requirement of DV programs, but that the services actually provided end up being more of crisis intervention than actual counseling/therapy.
- **Hotline services** - OCFS has established a joint hotline workgroup in addition to a hotline provided by OPDV that includes staff from both local and State hotlines.
- **Safe & Together™ Model** - Described during OCFS’ testimony, 40-60% of states’ child welfare cases involve domestic violence. This model focuses on holding persons who cause harm to children accountable for their actions while remaining survivor-centered and strengths based.

Throughout this testimony, Suzanne Miles-Gustave, Esq. reiterated that while OCFS is a leader in this work, our current system was created at a different time, and so changes need to be made.

Questions commenced from both Senator Persaud and Senator Webb following the OPDV and OCFS testimonies. Senator Persaud asked, “Are hotlines being staffed mainly

by agencies, and is there enough staffing for hotlines?” Owens responded that OPDV is 34 people, and the hotline is contracted out every three years (currently at Unity House). There is a crisis in the gender-based violence workforce; general staffing is needed. Senator Persaud followed up with, “Why do you think all of this workforce is not receiving COLA?” The OCFS Commissioner stated that “across the board, there is a workforce crisis coming out of the pandemic. Domestic Violence providers are not statutorily included in COLA, adding that legislative partners should address this in the future. The DV SAR (Domestic Violence State Aid Rate) does have a growth factor included in it, oftentimes giving this workforce the inflation bump that COLA does not provide to them. Just because DV providers aren’t included in the COLA doesn’t mean that their funding has stayed flat. This year, there is a 4.4% growth factor.”

NYS Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NYSCADV)

Testimony was provided by Joan Gerhardt, Director of Public Policy & Advocacy. Gerhardt declared that “New York policymakers have spent years talking about crime while shredding the safety net for many of the most vulnerable victims of crime,” while presenting the case that our system needs to be fixed and NYSCADV’s recommendations for how to do better. Gerhardt adamantly stated that in order to fix the current system, New York needs to:

- Ensure living wages for DV advocates and staff.
- Fully cover VOCA federal funding shortfalls for victim services providers.
- Ensure the long-term sustainability of victim services by enacting the Victim Services Stabilization Act.
- Prohibit competitive procurements for DV services.
- Create accountability in the State’s contracting process.
- Restructure the current per diem reimbursement model for funding DV shelters.
- Use State resources to match federal funding streams.
- Resurrect prevention efforts to end DV before it occurs.

Gerhardt’s testimony centered around transforming dated system models and implementing new funding requirements and other mechanisms to ensure adequate resources are available for domestic violence services. Gerhardt specifically characterized State bureaucracy as a “sinkhole.”

Crime Victims Assistance Center (CVAC)

Testimony was provided by Christine Battisti, CEO. She shared emotional testimony highlighting faults in the system by recognizing the many people, both adults and children, who have died recently due to domestic and gender-based violence. People whom she said could have

been helped if only we had the resources necessary to fund staff, cover expenses for shelters and CVAC services, and provide trauma-informed education to retain workers and other staffing. Ms. Battisti said her organization received a more than \$250,000 budget cut from the Office of Victims Services (OVS), forcing her to cut an entire department that handled HR-related duties for the Center. “Now we are hearing we may yet again face another cut,” said Battisti.

Furthermore, Battisti went on to state that if we truly want to reduce domestic violence, we need to sustain funding for offender accountability programs. These programs are designed to target the root causes of domestic violence, such as anger management, substance abuse, and learned behaviors. “By addressing these issues, we have the potential to break the cycle of violence and prevent further abuse within families,” said Battisti.

While funding was a common theme throughout the hearing, Senator Lea Webb asked, “Aside from funding, what can we do better to support providers?” To which Christine Battisti said, “Supporting us and connecting us better. Better leadership training.”

Senator Persaud and Webb asked additional questions for NYSCADV and CVAC. Senator Persaud asked, “What is the most pressing issue?” NYSCADV provided the information below when answering.

- We need to restructure the funding systems.
- Other states get the same funding in the same manner that we do. We don’t see other states spreading these around five or six agencies. This bureaucracy is a huge sinkhole.

Gerhardt went on to share that in other states, there are single point of contact contract managers. “It’s difficult in 2023 to sit down with a survivor and sort out the whole bureaucratic process.”

Empire Justice Center

Testimony was provided by Remla Parthasarathy, Managing Attorney - Crime Victims. Stressing the importance of legal services for DV and gender-based violence victims, Parthasarathy shared that there is a “major gaping hole in the system,” referring to the lack of resources available for contested divorces. She went on to say the federal VOCA grant is not enough. Cases may last beyond what grants can fund. OVS (Office of Victim Services) asked providers to prepare for not receiving funding in the third year, so the gap remains. Additionally, Parthasarathy noted the inconsistent application of the “family violence option” across local social services districts. “Data is tracked for DV screening, ‘credibility,’ and around the waiver process, and we see wild variations between districts in terms of the application waivers granted.”

During questioning, Senator Roxanne J. Persaud asked why there “are insufficient resources for contested divorces?” to which Ms. Parthasarathy noted that abusive partners use the court system to abuse their partners and, in turn, divorces can take a lot of time. Parthasarathy stated that family law and housing attorneys are the highest needs areas. She also shared that legal service providers are experiencing burnout like other professions in the sector, and organizations are having a tough time recruiting volunteers. The Empire Justice Center noted that some counties still don’t have *any* legal representation available.

New Hour for Women & Children

Testimony was provided by Serena Martin-Liguori, Executive Director. No written testimony has been provided as of this report. Martin-Liguori began her testimony by sharing that New Hour for Women & Children is a non-profit dedicated to supporting and empowering women, mothers, and children impacted by incarceration. She stated that she is a co-chair for Governor Kathy Hochul’s New York State DV task force, and she also shared that she is a formerly incarcerated person and a survivor of family violence that led to her incarceration. Martin-Liguori shared that she has been involved in the issue since then, and that she has championed solutions and helped draft what led to the Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act (Ch. 31 NYS Laws of 2019) sponsored by Senator Persaud.

Ms. Martin-Liguori testified that many criminalized women who have DV issues are afraid to call hotlines because they are afraid that their criminalization in the past will be used against them while making that phone call. Since there is a stigma around incarceration, many people feel they are not qualified, or they indeed are disqualified for services due to conviction. New Hour for Women holds 2,300 workshops yearly in Long Island jails (both Nassau and Suffolk counties). Their services ultimately follow women through the trajectory of incarceration because, Martin-Liguori asserted, the continuum of care is significantly lacking resources for women who have been incarcerated.

During questioning, Senator Persaud inquired about women’s fears about calling the hotlines, to which Martin-Liguori replied that long wait times are a challenge. Martin-Liguori added that public messaging on DV resources does not attempt to include criminalized survivors, so these survivors may not understand that they can utilize these hotlines and service networks as well. Senator Persaud asked Martin-Liguori for language to demonstrate her claim. Senator Lea Webb asked about what other messages are needed to support survivors. Martin-Liguori replied that, by and large, domestic and gender-based violence messages do not include those who have criminal records. Senator Persaud followed up by saying that she would appreciate any opportunity to create PSAs that uplift survivors who’ve been incarcerated.

Her Justice, Inc.

Testimony was provided by Hamra Ahmad, Director of Law & Policy. Ahmad's testimony centered around the legal needs of survivors and the changes that should be made to provide better, culturally sensitive and trauma-informed legal services. Ahmad outlined that the COVID-19 pandemic perpetuated the already burdened economic situations of survivors, and so the services of Her Justice, Inc. and other organizations like it that provide pro bono legal support are necessary, yet lacking. Echoing the Empire Justice Center testimony, Ahmad shared that contested divorces are a major issue within the legal system for DV and gender-based violence survivors. Additionally, she shared that child support "is a key policy priority for Her Justice in (their) efforts to advocate for greater fairness and efficiency of the system to ensure that children receive the most support parents can afford. This support can make up more than 50% of their income, playing a critical role for mothers and children living in poverty." Domestic violence abuse takes many forms. The economic abuse for DV victims from the abusers is perpetuated by delays of court cases, contested divorces, and more, Ahmad said, and further barriers are in place to support those who were formerly incarcerated and the immigrant population. In general, Her Justice, Inc. outlined the economic struggles of survivors, adding that consumer debt and low credit scores trap women in poverty. During the pandemic, debt collection cases moved forward, yet financial relief for custodial parents did not. Overall, the many factors that are preventing legal resources like Her Justice, Inc. from supporting and guiding survivors for a continuum of care critically need addressing.

During questioning, Senator Webb asked about the child support topic addressed by the Director. Ms. Ahmad, speaking in relation to uncontested cases, said that attending to these would significantly clear a backlog. Senator Webb then touched on the issue of the need for counsel for divorce cases. Ahmad underscored the need for assistance with uncontested and contested divorces. "We need to change how we measure success."

Senator Webb asked Hamra Ahmad of Her Justice, Inc. to expand upon the challenges and opportunities to remedy what Her Justice, Inc. is seeing as it pertains to child support services. Ahmad said that child support cases are unnecessarily difficult to navigate, and the complex process and delays have put a chokehold on clients to become financially independent. She shared that one way to make a change, as other states have done, is to handle it through an administrative path, leaving any litigation for specific cases that need it most.

Safe Horizon

Testimony was provided by Jimmy Meagher, LMSW, Policy Director. Meagher's testimony echoed others in that he shared many of the same grievances of DV providers on behalf of supporting DV survivors. His testimony focused on three main areas:

1. Fully covering significant shortfalls in federal VOCA funding for providers,
2. Ensuring a living wage for nonprofit human service workers and annual COLA,
3. Expanding access to domestic violence shelters for single adults.

Meagher stated that VOCA funding has been very low and continues to face cuts, further stating that “we are in a crisis. There needs to be a more permanent solution while advocacy efforts at the federal level continue.” Meagher asserted that the State must invest State dollars to make up for these shortfalls, noting that other states have been able to do this, and the Governor needs to find a way to do the same in New York.

On living wages for human services workers and COLA, Meagher stated that the low wages for workers who are oftentimes survivors themselves giving back to other survivors, the majority of whom are women and people of color, generate an economic justice issue for survivors. “We need the State to fund state contracts at appropriate levels.”

Lastly, Meagher touched on expanding access to DV shelters for single adults. In his testimony, he shared that families are prioritized in the housing system. Shelter reimbursement is a large barrier within this issue. “Domestic violence shelter providers face a major financial disincentive to downsize rooms intended for families to house single adults who are victims of domestic violence, human trafficking, and sexual assault. The current reimbursement structure makes it much more difficult for an individual survivor to access emergency shelter and the trauma-informed services available there. Faced with this obstacle, survivors might otherwise remain in unsafe situations as a result.”

Senator Persaud acknowledged that the human services sector is the first sector that is usually looked at when cutting funding. However, she stated, “It is the most important sector because if it is not supported, we will not be able to lift people up.”

Sanctuary for Families

Testimony was provided by Laura Fernandez, Senior Director of the Clinical Department. Fernandez outlined that Sanctuary for Families is a holistic service provider, administering services from crisis to survival, stability, and ultimately to self-sufficiency. The organization served 8,000 adults, children, and teens just last year (2022). Fernandez echoed other witnesses’ sentiments regarding the dismay of VOCA funding cuts. “Now, as we confront heightened incidence of domestic violence and a surge of deeply vulnerable refugees in our City and State, many of them survivors of gender-based violence (and/or at deep risk of exploitation), we simply cannot afford further reductions,” Fernandez asserted. On top of this, the emergency federal funds from the COVID-19 pandemic have now dissipated. With public funding being the main driver of human service salaries, Fernandez said, “current City and State contracts result in

some of the lowest paid workers in New York's economy. Contracts also rarely account for even modest cost of living adjustments from year to year.”

Child & Family Services

Testimony was provided by Tiffany Pavone, JD, Director of Victim Services. Previous witnesses raised many points that Pavone shared, but her testimony began with the assertion that “one of the biggest threats to our critical domestic violence services is our State’s funding.” Pavone stated that non-residential domestic violence TANF money has only increased by 7% in 20 years. She touched on VOCA and shared that caseloads are increasing by at least 50%, combined with burnout and inadequate compensation. As a result, staff are leaving because they are unable to support their own families while working in this high-stress working environment. This affects survivors in that advocates have larger caseloads and sometimes cannot show up for survivors in the way they may need to provide the best care, Pavone stated. The current funding structure creates an inevitable shortfall in funding. Like other witnesses, Pavone shared that her agency also has to take out lines of credit and then is not paid back interest on those loans due to the late payments of funding entities (including New York State).

HIGHLIGHTS OF TESTIMONY SUBMITTED BY ORGANIZATIONS NOT PRESENT AT HEARING

Center for Elder Law & Justice (CELJ)

CELJ's written testimony described their pro-bono services to older New Yorkers in criminal and civil matters, including services for older New Yorkers experiencing what CELJ stated is a growing trend of elder domestic violence and other forms of abuse. CELJ receives a significant portion of their funding through the federal Crime Victims Fund under the federal Victim of Crimes Act, and has thus experienced a reduction in funding. A reduction in VOCA funds for CELJ further negatively impacts the capacity of their work in elder abuse Enhanced Multi-Disciplinary Teams (E-MDTs) that provide comprehensive services to older New Yorkers experiencing abuse.

New York City Council Member Tiffany Cabán

Council Member Cabán referenced New York City Local Law 112 of 2022, creating the Housing Stability Support Program, which is designed to provide microgrants to survivors of domestic, gender-based, and sexual violence that help maintain housing. The Council Member expressed concern that the City Fiscal Year 2024-2025 budget allocated \$1.2 million, when \$6 million is required.

Council Member Cabán asserted the importance of programs that provide direct cash assistance to survivors, noting that such programs spend money quickly and efficiently. Examples included a \$500,000 microgrant program administered jointly by the Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence and Sanctuary for Families, and \$1 billion in Pandemic Emergency Assistance Fund dollars administered by the NYS Office of Children & Family Services to support survivors.

New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)

NYLAG asserted that New York State overall lacks sufficient shelter spaces, access to supportive and permanent affordable housing, options to address violence outside of the judicial system, and further, not enough attorneys to represent clients in violence-related civil and criminal matters. Though outside the jurisdiction of the Social Services and Women's Issues Committees, NYLAG drew concern to the way State-funded pro-bono legal services are contracted, arguing that funding supports only new cases presenting in a specific contract year and not cases initiated in prior years. NYLAG also called for stronger investments in pro-bono representation in contested divorce cases.

New York Legal Services Coalition (NYLSC).

NYLSC's testimony called for significant investments in both the human services and civil legal services sectors in which their member organizations operate. Civil legal services providers often employ social workers and non-legal case workers just as domestic violence services providers may, as part of their range of services, employ, contract, or otherwise partner with a civil legal service provider. NYLSC argued that human services workers and civil legal services workers are underpaid and are thus difficult to recruit or retain; favorable candidates seek employment in the public or private sectors.

NYLSC made four additional budgetary and policy recommendations: (1) the State Office of Victim Services should fund shortfalls resulting from cuts to the federal Victims of Crimes Act Crime Victims Fund in the amount of \$62.5 million in FY 2024-2025 and \$62.5 million in FY 2025-2026; (2) pass legislation or enact budget language similar in purpose to Maryland SB 0148 which was signed to Chapter 626 of the Laws of 2023 in that state; (3) implement prompt payment, renewal and registration of contracts across all concerned State agencies; (4) support pay parity for the civil legal services workforce.

Services for the Underserved (S:US)

S:US submitted written testimony largely concerning needs for the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities services sector, which fall outside of the jurisdiction and purview of the Social Services and Women's Issues Committees. S:US testimony did call for broader investments in the human services workforce, including, but not necessarily limited to, Direct Support Professionals (DSP), stating that underpayment of human services workers makes employee recruitment and retention difficult.

All submitted written testimony is viewable at <https://www.nysenate.gov/calendar/public-hearings/october-03-2023/joint-public-hearing-examine-whether-current-continuum>.

Report prepared by Lauren Walsh, Senate Fellow, and Dennis Weakley, Social Services Committee Director.

