

**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 Human Services**

**Testimony Presented by Connie Neal, Executive Director
January 24, 2019**

My name is Connie Neal and I am the Executive Director of the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (Coalition). On behalf of the Coalition, I want to thank Senator Kruger and Assemblymember Weinstein, and committee members for the opportunity to convey comments regarding the budget and human services 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 250 residential and non-residential domestic violence programs which serve more than 54,000 survivors of domestic violence and their children.

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

According to the National Census of Domestic Violence Services, **New York State has the highest demand for domestic violence services in the country, now three 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, 7,148 victims of domestic violence received services.
- On that same day, 852 requests for domestic violence services went unmet in New York because of critical funding and staffing shortages.

- And over the course of the past three years, 273 domestic violence program positions across New York were reduced or eliminated.

Simply put, we are losing ground. It is now critical for New York to make a meaningful investment in domestic violence services and primary prevention in our state.

PRIORITIES IN THE FY'20 NEW YORK STATE BUDGET FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES

During this legislative session, we have an opportunity that comes around once in a generation. That opportunity has provided the framework for the Coalition to advocate for several budgetary and legislative priorities including the following:

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

The Coalition is committed to working alongside Governor Cuomo, the Legislature, domestic violence advocacy programs, and domestic violence survivors across New York to re-envision the delivery of services for victims and re-affirm our collective commitment to ending domestic violence.

The Governor's 2019 Justice Agenda includes a plan to create a new model for domestic violence services, which will eliminate outdated barriers for survivors of domestic violence and domestic violence advocacy programs across the state. Governor Cuomo's proposal recognizes the state's system of funding and oversight of domestic violence programs is antiquated, having not been updated since it was first established more than 30 years ago. The Governor intends to abolish outdated policies and ensure that victims in need of shelter and other services are able to obtain the support they need immediately and without conditions.

This includes eliminating the requirement that survivors seeking shelter apply for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families assistance, or TANF, and eliminating fees for services that in New York are statutorily required to be charged to survivors. The federal government has advised the State that these requirements contradict Federal rules for Family Violence Prevention Services Act (FVPSA) funding. In order to comply with federal rules, the State's laws and regulations addressing domestic violence service delivery must be updated.

Governor Cuomo also proposed methods for streamlining the monitoring and reporting requirements placed on domestic violence programs. The Coalition supports these efforts, which will enable domestic violence service providers to dedicate more staffing and resources to what truly counts – providing services for domestic violence survivors and their families and leading domestic violence prevention initiatives in communities across the state.

To ensure the continuation of reforms in upcoming years, the Governor will appoint a task force made up of State agency representatives and local stakeholders to review the domestic violence service delivery system in New York State and make recommendations for improvement. This task force will be charged with streamlining State funding for domestic violence wherever possible in order to allow domestic violence service providers to more adequately address both the causes and effects of domestic violence, meet the needs of victims, and realize efficiencies. This restructuring will reduce reporting burdens on providers and State agencies, allow the State to

create an overall funding strategy based on best practices, grant providers the flexibility to meet the individual needs of domestic violence victims, and enable more effective program evaluation.

This process of reform is long overdue. The participation of the Coalition and primary purpose domestic violence service providers across the state on this new task force is critical in order for New York to successfully strengthen the overall system.

In the meantime, we have long standing gaps in funding for local domestic violence programs across the state as a result of years of flat or reduced investments.

Non-residential domestic violence services, which are mandated by New York State Social Service Regulations, are essential to New York State's response to domestic violence. The state budget provides only one dedicated stream of \$3 million to support these services. This is the same amount provided in the FY'00-'01 budget, 19 years ago. The Coalition and primary purpose domestic violence providers are urging the Legislature to increase state funding for non-residential services to \$6 million.

Similarly, because funds for domestic violence residential programs have been flat for years, domestic violence shelters are in critical need of additional support as well.

2. Establish a State Fund to Support the Critical Work of New York's Domestic Violence Service Providers

It is time for the State of New York to provide ample funding for domestic violence service providers so they, in turn, can provide living wages and benefits to their staff. This is hard, challenging, and often traumatic work that often results in rapid staff turnover. But today, a significant number of program personnel are paid little more than minimum wage. It is very difficult to attract and retain professionals in this environment.

We know domestic violence advocacy is rooted in the women's movement, and remains work that is still primarily provided by women. The challenging responsibilities of these individuals has been significantly undervalued, and it is clear that we must do more to value this work and support those advocates who provide critical life-saving services for survivors and their children.

State funding also will permit domestic violence providers to dedicate significant attention and funding for **primary prevention programs** which focus on stopping violence before it starts. The Coalition's prevention plan seeks to engage youth, men and diverse community partners in identifying and removing the factors that contribute to domestic violence. The plan can serve as a blueprint for a long-term undertaking with enormous benefits to all New Yorkers, and will lead the dialogue about domestic violence prevention across the country.

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

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.

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 so many 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 representative of the more than 100 domestic violence programs throughout the state, the Coalition 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 any state originating funding for the work that we do on behalf of New Yorkers.

We are asking Governor Cuomo and the Legislature to provide \$250,000 in the state budget to enable the Coalition to represent domestic violence providers and survivors during this critical time of assessment and re-visioning. We must be at the table, as the state cannot and should not get this process wrong.

4. Ensure Stable Funding For Domestic Violence Services

“Victims, their communities, and states are best served by the presence of a network of local programs whose sole purpose is to ensure that services and support for victims and their children exist, and that gaps and needs are identified and met. ... It is difficult to achieve these goals when programs are competing with one another for limited funds, are constantly facing the threat of losing funding and grant administrators view local programs as vendors instead of as experts that offer comprehensive solutions to a serious social problem.”¹ (Lauby, 2014)

The New York State budget historically contains little state originating funding to support domestic violence services, and relies heavily on federal funding sources. That level of federal funding is simply *not* enough. And we know that the partial federal government shutdown occurring now has significantly impacted domestic violence services provided by numerous domestic violence programs across the state.

Innovations in the work to end domestic violence “have come largely from states with reliable, non-competitive funding practices and strong state coalitions. Furthermore, it is observable that constant changes to funding levels and cuts to agencies have a deleterious effect on the ability of programs to meet the needs of victims.”²

Many domestic violence service providers pay staff and operating costs through funding they receive directly from the federal government. Since December, the availability of this already-approved funding has been uncertain, causing many programs to drain reserve accounts, max out lines of credit, cut back on critical services, or furlough or lay-off critical staff. The situation is amplified in New York, where federal funding flows through state agencies to domestic violence programs only four times a year, aggravating an already-challenging fiscal environment. If the shutdown continues much longer, the impact on critical support services for victims of domestic violence will get much worse.

In light of this perfect storm of system breakdowns, we urge the State of New York to revert to a system of monthly vouchering and payment (instead of the current quarterly process) so that domestic violence service providers can maintain the cash flow they need in order to retain staff and keep their doors open for survivors of domestic violence.

¹Lauby, Mary R. 2014. Domestic Abuse Grant Programs and Practices in Nine States.

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NEXT STEPS

Since our current system of domestic violence servicers was established in New York over thirty years ago, we have seen progress to support efforts to respond to domestic violence. However, we still have much work in front of us to not only be in compliance with federal laws and regulations, but also utilize this opportunity to do the best we can for survivors of domestic violence.

I urge you to implement strategies within the budget so no one who is asking for shelter or other domestic violence services is ever turned away. And 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. We will also lose advocates who simply cannot make ends meet as they try to provide critical services for survivors of domestic violence.

This opportunity comes around perhaps once in a generation. In the midst of the challenges and barriers we face, together we can do the right thing for survivors and advocates.

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

For Three Years In A Row, New York State Has The Highest Demand For Domestic Violence Services In The Country

*In the State of New York
On Just One Day in 2017 ...*

7,148 Survivors of Domestic Violence Were Served

852 Requests For Domestic Violence Services Went
Unmet, Largely Due To Funding Cuts

And In The Course Of Three Years ...

273 Domestic Violence Program Positions
Were Reduced or Eliminated



#PreventDVNY

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NEW YORK STATE COALITION
AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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