

**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  
on Human Services**

**Testimony Presented by Joan Gerhardt  
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The New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NYSCADV) was established more than 45 years ago as a statewide non-profit membership organization comprised of local domestic violence (DV) service providers and allied organizations that are committed to preventing and ending domestic violence. In New York, there are nearly 100 residential and non-residential domestic violence programs which operate at approximately 250 locations around the State.

NYSCADV is recognized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Justice as the information clearinghouse, primary point of contact and resource center on domestic violence for the State of New York. Among our roles and responsibilities, we provide education, training and technical assistance to domestic violence service providers; and support the development of policies, protocols and procedures to enhance domestic violence intervention and prevention.

New York has the highest demand for domestic violence services in the country. More than 10,000 survivors seek services each and every day. However, years of inadequate funding have prevented DV providers from serving all those in need. **An annual one-day assessment in 2024 found that more than 1,700 people could not access DV services due to a lack of resources – an increase of 64% from 2023.**

Why aren't these survivors getting the help they need? Because DV service providers are experiencing challenges on multiple fronts:

- **More than 90% of the funding New York State uses to support DV services comes from the federal government.** This includes funding under the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA), Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Title XX, and Solutions to End Homelessness Program (STEHP). This makes DV programs particularly vulnerable. The federal government has already taken steps to freeze several of these funding appropriations to New York, including TANF and Title XX which are used to pay for DV emergency shelter. If current temporary restraining orders are not extended, or if the federal government wins in court, New York will have to find an alternative source of funding to keep DV shelters open across the state.
- Compounding this chaotic situation, New York state agencies are repeatedly failing to execute contracts with DV programs until months after they are expected to begin their work. According to the State Comptroller, the state agencies DV service providers contract with for funding – the state Office for Children and Family Services (OCFS), the state Office for Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA),

the state Office of Victim Services (OVS), the Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) and the state Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV) – report being late on more than 90% of their contracts with not-for-profits. For example, in 2024, OPDV reported being late on 100% of its contracts; OTDA, 99%; DCJS, 91%; and OCFS, 91%.<sup>1</sup> This requires DV service providers to rely on lines of credit, or take out interest bearing loans, to cover payroll, lease obligations, utilities and other operating expenses.

- New York’s method for funding DV emergency shelter is broken. Reimbursements are frequently paid several months after services are provided. Each county that pays per diems for shelter stays has its own vouchering system, requiring DV providers to invest a significant amount of time figuring out these requirements and chasing down payments from around the state. Further, DV programs are only reimbursed when beds are occupied. DV programs are required to be fully staffed and ready to serve survivors every day. In order to do so, they must pay fixed costs for staff and facility expenses. When there are fluctuations in occupancy, the per diem payments do not cover the full cost of operating these facilities 365 days a year.
- Finally, DV advocates put their health, well-being and safety on the line every day. As frontline workers, they meet DV survivors where they are – at their homes, police stations and hospitals. Despite their years of training, experience and ongoing exposure to vicarious trauma, many are paid so little they can’t afford to rent a two-bedroom apartment. As a result, there has been an exodus of staff leaving DV programs for higher-paying employment – including the loss of leadership at several agencies.

Due to these circumstances, several DV programs are currently in danger of missing payroll, seeking state waivers for reduced personnel levels, cutting programming and/or opening costly lines of credit to maintain operations. Some have, or are contemplating, furloughs or layoffs as they wait for reimbursements. One DV provider on Long Island closed its doors. NYSCADV is providing support to several others who are on the fiscal brink.

It is critical for the Governor and Legislature to act now – to create an alternatively-funded reserve to protect DV programs from closure during this tenuous time, to sufficiently fund DV services so all victims continue to receive survivor-centered, trauma-informed care, and ultimately ensure the long-term continuity and sustainability of DV services across the state.

## **NYSCADV Appropriations Priorities**

NYSCADV urges the Legislature to support the needs of DV survivors and their families, as well as the not-for-profit and community-based advocacy organizations that support them, by implementing the following appropriations recommendations:

1. Create a \$10 million Emergency Contingency Plan to stabilize DV programs who are facing potential closure due to significant cash flow and funding issues.
2. Increase the Governor’s earmark in the Aid to Localities (ATL) Budget for OVS (page 1085) by \$25 million to support the 2025-2028 VOCA contracts with victim assistance providers.

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<sup>1</sup> NYS Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli, “Not-for-Profit Prompt Contracting Annual Report,” Calendar Year 2024, State Agency Provided Contracting Information; retrieved from: <https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/state-agencies/contracts/2024/pdf/pcl-state-agency-data-a1-2024.pdf>

3. Strengthen New York's safety net by ending competitive procurements of state-administered funding for state licensed and approved DV programs.
4. Increase the TANF set-aside for non-residential DV services by \$6.5 million to meet demand and account for inflation increases over the last 26 years (ATL Budget, page 539).
5. Stabilize the DV sector's diminishing workforce and infrastructure by providing a 7.8% increase on the total value of all NYS contracts with OCFS-licensed primary purpose DV programs.
6. Enhance shelter access for single adult survivors with SAFE Shelter Act (A3264/S7738).

**Appropriations Request #1: Create a \$10 million Emergency Contingency Fund to stabilize DV programs who are facing potential closure due to significant cash flow and funding issues.**

More than 90% of the funding New York uses to support DV services comes from the federal government. This makes DV programs particularly vulnerable. The federal government has already taken steps to freeze New York's federal funds. Most concerning, the federal government froze New York's TANF and Title XX grants, which are used to support DV emergency shelters and non-residential programs. Although a federal court has issued a temporary restraining order restricting implementation of this action, it is unclear whether a freeze will be enacted during or after the ensuing litigation. The federal government has also added certification requirements to other federal funding streams used to support DV services – requirements that directly violate New York's Human Rights Law. This has caused a chaotic, unstable environment for DV providers to operate in.

To make matters worse, many local DV agencies are struggling to manage cash flow because several state agencies are months late in executing contracts before DV programs are expected to begin their work. Once contracts are issued and DV programs can voucher for reimbursements, the state frequently fails to provide reimbursement within the statutorily required 60-day timeframe. These are significant financial stressors that are pushing DV agencies to the fiscal brink. In fact, a licensed DV program on Long Island recently closed its doors. Several others are struggling to meet payroll and are faced with reducing services for survivors.

NYSCADV is requesting the Legislature set aside \$10 million of the state's emergency reserves to ensure all licensed DV service providers can continue to operate under these challenging circumstances. These funds would be appropriated, pursuant to a plan developed by OCFS and approved by the Division of Budget, to OCFS-licensed, primary-purpose DV programs that are at risk of shutting down. In addition, DV programs facing insurmountable losses to facilities (e.g., due to natural disasters, fires, floods or major mechanical failures) will be able to access this funding, preventing them from having to obtain interest-bearing loans to rebuild or shut down.

**Appropriations Request #2: Increase the Governor's earmark in the Aid to Localities (ATL) Budget for OVS (page 1085) by \$25 million to support the 2025-2028 VOCA contracts with victim assistance providers.**

VOCA is the primary funding source for most DV providers in New York. It enables hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers to access services including shelter, housing, legal assistance, counseling and more. VOCA also funds legal services to help DV survivors obtain divorces and orders of protection, navigate their way through family court, and legally extricate themselves from dangerous living situations. Without VOCA funds, many victim service programs would cease to exist, leaving victims of DV, sexual violence, child abuse and child sexual abuse with nowhere to turn.

**New York's federal VOCA grant has declined \$127 million since 2018, losing 64% of its value.**

While the Governor's \$100 million commitment to address this shortfall is welcome news, and we urge the Legislature to maintain it, it is possible it will not be sufficient to support the 2025-2028 VOCA contracts, particularly in light of the potential for freezes or restrictions on federal funding streams. We urge the Legislature to increase the Governor's earmark by \$25 million to ensure the continuity of these critical safety net services.

**Appropriations Request #3: Strengthen New York's safety net by ending competitive procurements of state-administered funding for licensed and approved DV programs.**

DV survivors often seek help in moments of crisis, and access to services must be consistent, predictable, and geographically available. Yet New York's long-standing reliance on competitive procurements to distribute DV funding destabilizes essential DV programs by creating uncertainty from procurement to procurement, disrupting staff retention, eroding institutional expertise, and threatening continuity of care. When services are interrupted or eliminated due to procurement outcomes, survivors bear the consequences – often at significant risk to their safety and well-being.

New York's competitive procurement policies also undermine the survivor-centered and trauma-informed nature of DV services. Providers are required to build long-term trust with survivors and communities, particularly with marginalized populations who may already be wary of systems. New York's competition-based funding model prioritizes grant-writing capacity and technical compliance over demonstrated community trust, cultural responsiveness and survivor outcomes. This can disadvantage smaller, culturally specific programs that are deeply embedded in their communities but lack the administrative resources to compete effectively, despite being uniquely positioned to meet survivors' needs.

Finally, competition is ill-suited to a service field that depends on collaboration rather than market dynamics. DV providers must coordinate closely with one another, law enforcement, courts, healthcare systems, housing providers, and child welfare agencies to ensure survivor safety and accountability for those who cause harm. Yet, competitive funding pits these not-for-profit providers against one another, discouraging information sharing and collective problem-solving, and weakening coordinated community responses. Stable, non-competitive funding better supports collaboration, accountability, and a comprehensive service continuum that reflects the public responsibility to protect survivors and prevent violence.

NYSCADV urges the Legislature to restrict state agencies from distributing funding for DV services via competitive procurements by adding the following budgetary language for all state agencies that administer funding for DV services:

“For services and expenses related to the provision of domestic violence services, such funds are to be available pursuant to a plan prepared by [name of state agency] and approved by the director of the budget to continue or expand existing programs with existing OCFS-licensed and approved contractors that are satisfactorily performing as determined by [name of state agency], without any additional requirements that such contracts be subject to competitive bidding, a request for proposal process or other administrative procedures.”

**Appropriations Request #4: Increase the TANF set-aside for non-residential DV services by \$6.5 million to meet demand and account for inflation increases over the last 26 years (ATL Budget, page 539).**

Each year, more and more DV survivors are seeking non-residential supportive services such as information and referral, counseling, legal advocacy and financial empowerment assistance. These services are funded in part with a dedicated stream of TANF funding. The Governor's FY'27 Executive Budget sets this earmark at \$3 million, **the same level as when it was first proposed 26 years ago**. We appreciate the Legislature's addition of \$200,000 to this pot last year, but this slight increase isn't sufficient to cover the very high demand for these services across the state.

New York has significant TANF reserves in place that can support a higher earmark without jeopardizing the sustainability of the reserves. **In fact, since 2023, New York has accumulated \$2 billion in unspent TANF block grant funds, equal to 81% of its block grant.**<sup>2</sup> Increasing New York's TANF set-aside for non-residential DV services to \$9.6 million represents 0.003% of these unspent funds.

Further, NYS spent only 1% of its total TANF grant and matching funds – \$48 million – on programs related to health, mental health, substance abuse, disability services, housing counseling, family support, and DV. The fact is, these are federal dollars that New York State has in its coffers, but appears unwilling to use to support its most vulnerable people.

Finally, when adjusted for inflation, the \$3 million appropriation first set in 2000 would have to be \$5.8 million today to provide the same level of supports and services for victims.

We urge the Legislature to increase to \$9.6 million the federal TANF set-aside for non-residential DV services to address inflation and the high demand for such services.

**Appropriations Request #5: Stabilize the DV sector's diminishing workforce and infrastructure by providing a 7.8% increase on the total value of all NYS contracts with OCFS-licensed primary purpose DV programs.**

DV providers are dedicated and passionate professionals. The work can be grueling and traumatic. DV advocates meet DV survivors where they are – at the police station, in court, in a medical facility – to provide critical, life-stabilizing services. Their work is challenging and requires specialized preparation and training.

For decades, New York State and its local governments have relied on nonprofit DV agencies to provide critical services for survivors experiencing DV, including those who live in marginalized or under-served communities. These services come at a cost and it is incumbent upon New York State to value the work and fully pay for it.

But that's not what has occurred over the past several years. Instead, budgets for DV services have been flat or reduced, despite increased demand for such services and the impacts of inflation. **Worse, DV advocates have been excluded from every budgetary initiative intended to raise wages for human services workers.**

This failure to provide equitable, living wages for DV advocates has had a disastrous impact on the ability of DV programs to retain and recruit employees. According to a 2022 survey conducted by NYSCADV and the New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NYSCASA) of DV and sexual

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<sup>2</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "New York TANF Spending". Retrieved from: [https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/tanf\\_spending\\_ny.pdf](https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/tanf_spending_ny.pdf)

assault programs across the state<sup>3</sup>, 90% of respondents reported experiencing staff turnover in 2021. In total, respondents reported 547 voluntary staff departures in 2020 and 645 voluntary staff departures in 2021. More recently, DV advocates have stated, “People aren’t willing to work weekends or respond to emergency calls at all hours for the low pay we offer” and “People who work in this field are forced to live in poverty just to do a job they are passionate about.”

Far too many employees have left for higher-paying employment within their own multi-service agencies, or for jobs in government, academia or at other human services organizations. Remaining staff, including program leadership, have been tasked with covering the work of multiple positions, leading to burnout, illness and additional resignations. All of which impacts the ability of DV agencies to support DV survivors. Victims in New York State deserve better and so do those who support them.

This year, the Governor’s proposed Targeted Inflationary Increase for human services workers again excludes DV advocates. These DV advocates perform similar duties to those human services workers included in the eligibility pool. And DV programs are contracted to perform their work with OCFS, as are several human services agencies included in the eligibility pool.

NYSCADV supports Senator Roxanne Persaud’s bill to provide a 2.7% targeted inflationary increase for human services programs, including DV service providers and VOCA subgrantees (S3669B). However, because DV advocates’ salaries are so much lower than other human services not-for-profits, NYSCADV supports a 7.8% increase for DV advocates and staff at OCFS-licensed, primary purpose DV agencies, an estimated cost of \$3.5 million.

#### **Appropriations Request #6: Enhance Shelter Access for Single Adult Survivors with SAFE Shelter Act (A3264/S7738)**

DV shelters were originally designed to provide services and shelter for fleeing families (e.g., one adult and one or more children). As such, shelter units are typically intended to house more than one occupant. More recently, the number of single adult victims of DV seeking temporary housing has increased, creating a new predicament for DV shelter operators – house a single adult in a double occupancy room and lose revenue (because per diem reimbursement cannot be provided for an unused bed) or prioritize filling beds to obtain full reimbursement.

The SAFE Shelter Act addresses these challenges by removing the financial penalty shelters face when they house a single survivor in a room designed for two. This will no longer force providers to choose between protecting a survivor and preserving the resources they need to keep their doors open.

### **NYSCADV Recommendations on Article VII Proposals**

#### **1) Part C: Criminal Penalties for Manufacture of Ghost Guns and Part**

Ghost guns are designed to evade background checks, registration requirements and law enforcement tracing, making them particularly attractive to individuals prohibited from possessing firearms and to those engaged in criminal activity. Penalizing their manufacture closes a critical loophole in existing gun regulations. NYSCADV supports this proposal.

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<sup>3</sup> New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence and New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault. Sexual Assault & Domestic Violence Programs Salary and Benefits Survey. October 3, 2022.

**2) Part E: Modifications to Sexual Offense Evidence Collection Kit (SOECK) Protocols**

NYSCADV supports the Governor's proposed modifications to SOECK protocols and supports creation of a working group to make recommendations to improve and streamline the State's tracking system of such materials. NYSCADV asks the Legislature to ensure NYSCADV, as the designated statewide DV coalition, and the designated statewide sexual assault coalition, participate on such working group.

**3) Part H: Support Extension of Certain Criminal and Civil Orders of Protection**

NYSCADV supports the Governor's proposal to require courts to extend criminal and civil Temporary Orders of Protection until defendants or respondents subsequently appear. Temporary orders are issued based on a judicial finding that immediate protection is warranted. Allowing these orders to lapse solely because a defendant or respondent doesn't appear undermines survivor safety and the integrity of the court process. Requiring courts to extend these orders reduces the risk of further harm and ensures that the court – not the defendant's or respondent's absence – controls when and how the underlying allegations are addressed.

*Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.*