

February 5, 2019

The Honorable {Legislator's full name}  
{Building / Street}  
Albany, NY {ZIP}

Re: New York State Budget FY '19 – '20

Dear {Assembly member/Senator + last name},

I am writing to you today as a/an {advocate, program director, executive director, etc.} at {your organization}.

Governor Cuomo's FY 2019-2020 Executive Budget acknowledges that the State's system of funding and oversight of domestic violence programs is antiquated, having not been updated since it was established more than 30 years ago. I encourage you to support his efforts to abolish outdated policies to ensure that victims in need of shelter and other services are able to obtain the support they need immediately and without conditions.

Many of the reforms proposed in the Governor's budget will likely take some time to implement. But New York's survivors need support and assistance now. New York State continues to have the highest demand for domestic violence services in the country. According to a national survey<sup>1</sup>, in just **ONE** day in 2017, 7,148 victims sought and received domestic violence services. More notable, 852 requests for services went unmet because of critical funding and staffing shortages.

It's critical for the Legislature to close long-standing gaps in funding for domestic violence programs across the state that have resulted from years of flat or reduced investments. I urge you to **support increases to critical funding in the budget so no one who is asking for shelter or other domestic violence services is ever turned away.**

In 2019, we have four budgetary priorities:

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

The Governor intends to abolish outdated policies and ensure that victims in need of shelter and other services are able to obtain the support they need immediately and without conditions.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 requirements that survivors seeking shelter apply for TANF, and eliminating fees for services that in New York are statutorily required to be charged to survivors. However, a dollar for dollar swap of state originating dollars with TANF will not address long-standing gaps in service for survivors of domestic violence in New York.

**Request: Funds for domestic violence residential programs have been flat for years. An additional \$50 million in support is needed to fix the system. We urge the Legislature to move toward this funding goal.**

**Request: Funding for non-residential domestic violence services in the state budget is at the same level it was 19 years ago when it was first proposed. We urge the Legislature to increase this funding to \$6 million.**

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<sup>1</sup> National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2017 Domestic Violence Counts: A 24-Hour Census of Domestic Violence Shelters and Services DV Counts

## 2) 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. In fact, for every 20 New Yorkers, five women and three men will experience or have already experienced domestic violence.

The New York State Coalition Against Domestic Services (NYSCADV) serves as the voice for more than 100 domestic violence programs throughout the state. They are in a prime position to assist the Legislature throughout the reform process. Unlike many of its peer domestic violence coalitions across the country, they do not receive any state originating funding for the work that they do on behalf of New Yorkers.

**Request: We are asking the Legislature to provide \$250,000 in the state budget to enable NYSCADV to provide statewide coordination of domestic violence issues and represent domestic violence service providers during this critical time of assessment and re-visioning.**

## 3) Establish a State Fund to Support the Critical Work of New York's Domestic Violence Service Providers

It is time for the State to provide ample funding for domestic violence service providers so we can provide living wages and benefits to our staff. Today, a significant number of program personnel are paid little more than minimum wage.

Domestic violence advocacy is rooted in the women's movement, and remains work that is still primarily provided by women. It is clear that we must do more to value these advocates who provide critical life-saving services for survivors and their children.

State funding also will permit domestic violence providers to implement primary prevention programs which focus on stopping violence before it starts.

**Request: We are requesting \$4 million to support the work of domestic violence advocates and launch domestic violence prevention initiatives across the state.**

## 4) Ensure Stable Funding For Domestic Violence Services

The New York State budget relies heavily on federal funding sources for domestic violence services. That level of federal funding is simply *not* enough.

Many domestic violence programs have funding they receive directly from the federal government. Since December, access to this 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.

**Request: We urge the State to revert to a system of monthly vouchering and payment (instead of the current quarterly process) so that domestic violence programs can maintain the cash flow they need in order to retain staff and keep their doors open for survivors of domestic violence.**

If you would like more information, I can be reached at **{phone number}**, or you can contact Connie Neal, Executive Director of NYSCADV, at 518-482-5465.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

**{Your name and title}**