

NYSCADV 2023 DAY OF ACTION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Preparing for legislative meetings ahead of time can help you feel confident and relaxed. One of the best methods to prepare is to identify questions you may be asked in advance, then rehearse potential answers.

We've identified a few potential questions here and have provided a guide for answering each one. Don't try to memorize these responses verbatim. Rather, use them as a guide to formulate your own answers. And if a legislator asks a question that you do not feel comfortable answering, feel free to offer to have NYSCADV follow up with them after your meeting.

Q1: I know you've been looking for funding for DV services in this year's State Budget. What were you looking for and what is in the Final Budget?

A1: We have not received confirmation that the Final State Budget includes the funding we requested: a transfer of \$14.4 million to the state Office of Victim Services to support existing contracts with victim service providers; \$11.7 million for the 87 victim service providers that received cuts in their VOCA awards; and an increase in non-residential DV services funding from \$3.2 million to \$6 million, in light of the increased demand and to adjust for inflation. We are still hopeful this funding is included in the Final Budget so we can stabilize funding in the long-term and ensure the sustainability and continuity of these critical services.

Q2: I've heard DV advocates suggest that New York should change the way it funds DV services. Can you provide more information about that?

A2: New York reimburses DV programs when DV survivors are in shelter. This per diem reimbursement model prioritizes shelter over non-residential services, which is not a survivor-centered approach. DV programs have to ensure shelters are ready for full occupancy and fully staffed 24/7, but they only get reimbursed for expenses when shelter beds are occupied. DV programs spend an inordinate amount of time chasing down payments from county Departments of Social Services, time that should be focused on services for DV survivors. It is not unusual for DV programs to wait years to be reimbursed. Further, external factors like the pandemic impact the number of survivors that seek shelter, which negatively impacts the revenue a DV program will receive. We want the State to move away from a per diem reimbursement model to one where shelters are reimbursed on the basis of full occupancy 365 days a year.

Q3: This year, the Governor proposed requiring OPDV to develop a model DV policy for counties, which does not appear to be in the final State Budget. Did you support or oppose the proposal?

A3: That's correct. This proposal was not included in the final Public Protection and General Government (PPGG) budget bill. The New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault didn't think this was the best time to implement this work. Due to years of funding cuts, DV and sexual assault programs are barely keeping their doors open. We are cutting programs, laying off staff and keeping vacant positions open. Many staff are working two or three jobs just to cover their own expenses. While it may make sense to update the existing DV model policy for counties in the future, our focus now is working with the State to ensure DV programs are fully funded.

Q4: There were many media reports at the beginning of the Pandemic suggesting the incidence of domestic violence increased during the Pandemic. Is that what you're finding?

A4: Many DV programs across the State are reporting increased volume to their hotlines, an increased number of clients, an increase in the severity of violence related to DV incidents, and an increase in the complexity of service requests. *[Provide information regarding your program]*

One of the most significant and lingering impacts on the provision of services to DV survivors during the pandemic is the difficulty we've been experiencing retaining and recruiting staff. The country is experiencing The Great Resignation, and not-for-profits like DV programs are not immune. That being said, because funding levels for DV services have been stagnant for many years, we are unable to pay staff wages that reflect the true value of their work. Many advocates can make more money working at a Starbucks then working in a shelter, and it's a much less traumatic, stressful job to boot. *[Provide information regarding your program]*

Q5: Were DV advocates included in this year's COLA? Have they ever received a COLA?

A5: No. DV advocates are not included in the group of human service workers that have historically received a COLA. Nor were DV advocates included in this year's COLA. DV advocates are essential frontline staff whose work requires specialized skills and training. It is often challenging and traumatic work, requiring 24/7 availability so they can provide critical, life-stabilizing services for New Yorkers. Yet the lack of fair wages and lack of respect for these professionals has caused an exodus from local agencies throughout the State, seriously jeopardizing the accessibility of services to those in need. *[Provide information regarding your program]*

Q6: It looks like the Final State Budget will include new criminal justice reforms. Will these changes be good for DV survivors?

A6: We have not had an opportunity to review the agreed upon reforms. We'd be happy to get back to you once we've had a chance to do so.

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