

The following priorities highlight focus areas for CCADV to strengthen both statutory and administrative policy and practice that help domestic violence survivors to achieve safety and stability. The policy priorities seek to address the large number of complex factors that impact the ability of both the survivor and the family as a whole to live a life free from violence.

SECURE VITAL FUNDING FOR VICTIM SERVICES

For years Connecticut, like many other states, has relied heavily on federal funding available through the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Fund to support a variety of victim services. Critical domestic violence services have been funded by VOCA grants, including in both court-based and community-based settings, as well as the entire statewide domestic violence hotline. Unfortunately, it appears as though VOCA is no longer a stable funding source.

The VOCA Fund contains non-taxpayer fines and fees resulting from federal criminal prosecutions, largely of white-collar crimes. Despite the efforts of the current federal administration and Congress to fix how deposits are made to VOCA, federal criminal prosecutions have simply not occurred at the level needed to restore the VOCA Fund, resulting in smaller grants to the states.

VOCA currently funds approximately **127 direct service positions across CCADV and our 18 member organizations**. The impact of a 50% cut on VOCA-funded domestic violence services in Connecticut would be devastating. It would mean a **loss of \$3,772,000 annually, or \$7,544,000 over the biennium**, resulting in the reduction of staff and subsequently services to victims.

- CCADV is joining with over 30 other VOCA-funded victim service providers to call on Governor Lamont and the General Assembly to allocate funding in the amount of **\$13.175 million in FY24 and \$20 million in FY25 to address cuts in federal VOCA funds**. According to the Judicial Branch Office of Victim Services, Connecticut's VOCA state administrator, this is the amount of funding needed to keep victim services, including domestic violence services, flat-funded across the state through state fiscal year 2025.

ADDRESS THE GROWING PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS OF MATERNAL DEATHS DUE TO IPV

Recently published research demonstrates that women in the U.S. are more likely to be murdered during pregnancy or soon after childbirth than to die from the three leading obstetric causes of maternal mortality (hypertensive disorders, hemorrhage, or sepsis). Here in Connecticut, the Department of Public Health cites the presence of intimate partner violence (IPV) in 25% of pregnancy related deaths. These homicides are preventable and increased public awareness about IPV, and specifically the increased risk during and after pregnancy, is one way to strengthen the health and safety of birthing individuals.

- Build upon maternal health and safety resources outlined in Public Act 22-58 by including a requirement that all birthing hospitals in Connecticut provide information and resources about domestic violence and services available through CCADV's 18 member organizations to all postpartum patients. CCADV will work collaboratively with the birthing hospitals to offer training and education to all providers tasked with distributing this information to patients.

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STRENGTHEN ECONOMIC JUSTICE, SELF-SUFFICIENCY & ACCESS TO SAFE, AFFORDABLE HOUSING

A myriad of economic barriers often compound the effects of domestic violence. Financial independence and access to basic needs are often cited by survivors as their primary safety concern for themselves and their children, while access to affordable housing is one of the largest barriers to achieving safety and stability. Furthermore, the economic abuse that is a common control tactic in abusive relationships depletes survivors' financial resources, damages their credit, and limits their ability to find and maintain employment and safe housing.

- Ensure that survivors can safely and without penalty exit shared "family plan" contracts (e.g., wireless, cable). These contracts, which are common as a cost-saving measure in families, often pose a safety risk to survivors as they can leave them financially tied to their abuser and allow their abuser to determine their location.
- Create mechanisms to provide relief from coerced debt for survivors, a common element of financial abuse which has nationally been shown to be present in 98% of abusive relationships.
- Prohibit abusers convicted of attempted murder, conspiracy to commit murder, or certain other Class A or B felonies designated as family violence against their spouse from receiving alimony from their victims.
- Require landlords to return any security deposit owed back to a tenant within 15 days after termination of tenancy provided the tenant has provided the landlord with written notification of such tenant's forwarding address. Survivors are often in critical need of the money they have paid for a security deposit as they address the expenses of their new living arrangement.
- Strengthen access to SNAP benefits for survivors through possible waivers that fall within federal regulations, such as waivers from work requirements that may prove problematic in the immediate aftermath of trauma.
- Support other key economic justice initiatives that impact survivors, such as:
 - Sealing and/or expungement of eviction records which, whether or not the result of their abuser's actions while residing together, often remain a barrier for survivors and their children as they attempt to secure safe, affordable housing.
 - Expanding safety net benefits (e.g., SNAP, Medicaid) for undocumented adult immigrants.
 - Increasing funding for Care4Kids.

ENHANCE THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Connecticut has been a leader in establishing a strong systemic response to domestic violence, particularly within our criminal justice system. Various councils have been statutorily created to provide guidance on issues such as law enforcement's response and domestic violence offender program standards. We propose creating one advisory council that will assess and provide guidance to the criminal justice response in a more holistic manner, with an eye towards innovative, cost effective enhancements that meet the needs of survivors. The council would report findings and recommendations annually to the General Assembly's Judiciary Committee.

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