



Council of the District of Columbia

Committee of the Whole and Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety

DC Police Reform Commission Recommendations

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Submitted written testimony of:

DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence

5 Thomas Circle, NW

Washington, DC 20005

Tel. 202-299-1181

www.dccadv.org

The DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence (DCCADV or The Coalition) is the federally-recognized statewide coalition of domestic violence service providers in the District. The Coalition's members include crisis and transitional housing providers, counseling and case management services, legal services, and culturally specific organizations serving: African-American; Latino; Asian and Pacific Islander; Immigrant; and LGBTQ survivors of domestic violence. Our members also serve teens and youth and survivors who are Deaf and Deaf/Blind. The sixteen member programs we represent are on the front lines each day providing life-saving services to more than 30,000 District residents each year. Domestic violence continues to be a leading public safety concern, with 39 percent of women living in D.C. having experienced sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking perpetrated by an intimate partner.¹

The Coalition supports many of the recommendations put forth by the Police Reform Commission. For many years, DCCADV has testified at MPD's performance and budget oversight hearings around similar issues. We have testified to bring awareness to some of the awful things that we have heard from survivors and member programs about their experiences with law enforcement in the District. We have also testified because some of our programs are afraid to come forward and express their concerns about MPD directly. Even before last summer, we consistently heard from survivors and domestic violence service providers about many issues with DC's law enforcement agencies. In past efforts to address these concerns, we talked to MPD commanders, provided trainings for police officers and Detectives, and engaged law enforcement with ways to better support survivors. Yet, we continued to hear that law enforcement re-traumatizes survivors, sometimes does not believe them, and even worse, some officers initiates acts of violence against them.

¹ Source: S.G. Smith, et al., *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2010-2012 State Report (2017)*

In response to this, in the summer of 2020, DCCADV held four listening sessions with survivors of domestic violence. The focus of these listening sessions was to hear from survivors about their experiences with law enforcement, specifically what happened when the police responded to a domestic violence incident. The listening forums were mostly comprised of survivors who identify as people of color and represented all ages. Survivors who participated described an overall lack of trust of law enforcement, due to negative experiences and abusive behaviors from officers. Some survivors expressed that they feared deportation if they were to complain about an officer or experienced further victimization by MPD after filing a complaint. Additionally, many survivors felt that a difficult situation, turned into a traumatic experience when law enforcement made the situation worse, by blaming them, exhibiting a lack of empathy, or making sexist jokes.

In January of 2021, DCCADV's membership voted to pass a position statement: [The Intersection of Police Response and Domestic Violence in DC](#), on the intersections of police response and the needs of survivors of domestic violence. Our statement overlaps with a number of the Commission's recommendations related to the law enforcement's response to domestic violence. Secondly, on May 4, DCCADV released a response to the Police Reform Commission's Report. You can read both statements in full on our website, but this testimony will address a few points in the Police Reform Commission's Report.

First, recommendation 6(a) states that with funding from the Council, the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants (OVSJG) should expand the number of domestic violence advocates and allied social workers and counselors who can be safely deployed as first responders in lieu of police or, alternatively, as co-responders along with officers in situations where violence is actively unfolding, could quickly escalate, or if a weapon is involved.

Every year, in addition to testifying at hearings for MPD, we also testify at OVSJG hearings, and every year we ask for more funding to provide critical services to survivors. Domestic violence service providers are under-funded, and many are working at capacity to provide critical services to survivors. We acknowledge that many survivors rely on law enforcement, but we are happy to see that the Commission recommends more funding to expand the number of domestic violence advocates to support alternative responses. The flat funding that many of our programs have received over the years or funding cuts mean DV programs do not have the capacity to fully implement programs that would allow this kind of collaboration. We strongly support the recommendation, and note that in addition to providing more funding to service providers, this initiative will require clear infrastructure as it relates to changes in practices and protocols and more training for 911 operators and responding organizations.

Another recommendation – recommendation 6(c) – advises that once a DV co-response model is in effect districtwide, the Council should repeal the mandatory arrest law and replace it with clear guidance that MPD officers should follow, making arrest decisions in consultation with domestic violence advocates on the scene and survivors themselves.

While mandatory arrest laws were originally praised as being beneficial to survivors, these policies may have made survivors less safe and increased mortality rates.² Incidents of domestic violence are already traumatic and can be lethal for survivors and their families. In 2019, MPD answered almost 29,000 calls for service related to domestic violence. However, that data only covers calls for service, incidents of domestic violence and the number of arrests. As the District examines

² Bridgett, Alayna., “Mandatory-Arrest Laws and Domestic Violence: How Mandatory- Arrest Laws Hurt Survivors of Domestic Violence Rather Than Help Them”, *Health Matrix*, Volume 30, 2020, p. 455

alternatives to policing, the process should involve survivors in the community. The Coalition is in the process of establishing a Survivor Advisory Council and we will be happy to assist in further discussions or research regarding this recommendation.

Another recommendation in section II of the report states that the Council, Mayor, and Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants should develop public-private partnerships to expand temporary shelter for survivors of domestic violence. During FY 2020, the Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness, DCCADV, and the six domestic violence housing organizations in DC worked with The Raben Group to develop a District-wide Domestic Violence Housing Strategic Plan. The funding to support the development of this strategic plan was made possible by the Council, who allocated fund to OVSJG to ensure a comprehensive plan was developed to guide the growth of survivor-specific housing in the District.

The DV Housing Strategic Plan was developed to identify the DV specific housing and services currently available, identify funding across the District that currently supports DV housing, outline barriers to safe and stable housing survivors of DV experience, and provide recommendations to improve housing options for survivors of DV in DC. In their February 2021 Performance Oversight response, the Department of Human Services (DHS) reported “in FY20, 677 families (95% of families) who were assessed for homeless services (through the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center (VWFRC) were) identified as, or disclosed being, survivors of domestic violence/having experienced domestic violence.”³

It is clear survivors need DV specific housing assistance more than ever. In the one-day census of nationwide domestic violence services, 507 adult and child survivors sought assistance for

³ https://dccouncil.us/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/DHS_2021-Performance-Oversight-Pre-Hearing-Responses.pdf

emergency shelters, transitional housing, or other housing in the District.⁴ However, for survivors who made requests for services, during that one day in September 2020, 37 percent of the unmet requests were housing-related. DC doesn't need additional data or research to know that there is a need for housing for survivors. The Coalition supports the Police Reform Commission's recommendation to expand DV housing, and we look to the Mayor's Office to implement the DV Housing Strategic Plan.

A third recommendation in the report stated that The Council should invest in community-based organizations led by Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) to create safe and supportive spaces for communities to hold informal and organic restorative justice circles for healing in the wake of some violent crimes and traumatic events.

The Coalition believes restorative justice is a valuable option for some survivors who wish to pursue it. Many survivors don't want to access the criminal legal system or may not want to see the abuser charged or incarcerated. This is especially true for survivors who are Black, Brown, and/or are undocumented. During the listening sessions last summer, some survivors expressed they want different options, more than the police or courts.

DCCADV encourages the Council to invest in a restorative justice program that is led by BIPOC, is survivor-centered and trauma informed, and is developed by the community.

In Section III of the report, the Commission recommends that the school policing infrastructure should be dismantled and replaced with a holistic public health approach to school safety and crisis intervention that is relational, racially just, restorative, trauma-responsive, and trauma-informed.

⁴ Domestic Violence Counts Report – District of Columbia Summary: <https://nnev.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/15th-Annual-DV-Counts-Report-District-of-Columbia-Summary.pdf>

The Coalition supports this recommendation and we support the removal of MPD officers from DC Public Schools. In DC, Black students are more likely to be arrested when there are police officers in the schools.⁵ The data on arrests and the way Black and Brown youth are treated by police doesn't even speak to the years of trauma, stress and pain youth have to endure because police are in schools. The \$25 million that funded MPD in schools in FY2021 could have been invested in mental health programs and domestic violence prevention efforts. We support the Commission's call for increased trauma-informed training for teachers and staff, restorative justice programming, and expansion of school-based violence interrupter programming and training.

The Coalition has identified other ways to support survivors of domestic violence that expand on the Police Reform Commission's report that can be viewed in our statement on the PRC's recommendations. We thank the District for investing in this essential work and are proud to be a part of the solution.

⁵ *The Black Swan Academy citing the 2019 School Report Card.*