

CITY OF DALLAS

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TASK FORCE REPORT

2020



City of Dallas

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## BACKGROUND

The Domestic Violence Task Force was created in 1987 in effort to create a collaborative environment for local law enforcement, city government, representatives of the criminal justice system, and intimate partner and family violence prevention organizations to address the problems of domestic violence. In March of 2020, Mayor Eric Johnson charged Councilmember Jennifer Gates, Chair of the Domestic Violence Task Force, and Task Force members to create recommendations that would pave the way for a 25% decrease in domestic violence aggravated assaults over the next three years. The Mayor specifically asked that the Task Force address shelter space, training for the Dallas Police Department, comprehensive domestic violence education embedded in the Dallas Independent School District and Richardson Independent School District, and improved transportation for domestic violence victims, then identify an actionable plan to decrease the risk of severe injury or death for victims. Since the Mayor’s request to the Task Force, partner law enforcement agencies and domestic violence agencies have learned to serve their clients through a global pandemic and during calls to reform both police departments and local governments to address racial inequity pervasive in society and institutions. With this in mind, the Task Force also made recommendations on better serving multicultural and diverse clients and expanding access to services for all victims.

## MEMBERS

**Jennifer Gates**, Chair

Councilmember, District 13

**Jan Langbein**, Sub-Committee Chair, Violence Reduction

CEO of Genesis Women’s Shelter

**Paige Flink**, Sub-Committee Chair, Bed Capacity

CEO of The Family Place

**Sarah Evans**, Sub-Committee Co-Chair,

Public School Curriculum

City of Dallas, Liaison to Councilmember Jennifer Gates

**Elizabeth Saab**, Sub-Committee Co-Chair,

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**Sarah Nejdli**, Sub-Committee Chair, Transportation

Founder & Executive Director of Families to Freedom

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Program Director of Victim Services,

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Domestic violence touches countless lives. It is estimated that one in three women and one in nine men in Texas will experience domestic violence at some point in their life. Since 2019, Dallas has seen an increase in crime and that trend continues today. As of Sept. 21, 2020, family violence aggravated assaults increased 8.6% over last year, and family violence homicides – though not on par with the previous year – are still high with 26 to date compared to 31 at this time last year.

The Task Force is intentionally comprised of many disparate groups because it takes all our organizations and our entire community working in tandem to decrease domestic violence in our City. While some of these recommendations are fully within the City's control through changing practices or adding roles in the Dallas Police Department, many will require concerted efforts across multiple agencies and governmental organizations. These recommendations are the result of a collaboration between government agencies, domestic violence shelter and service providers, professors and law enforcement representatives with years of expertise addressing the problems of domestic violence. We have addressed domestic violence from the lens of prevention and education where possible, and in improving outcomes for domestic violence victims when incidents have already occurred. We have also committed to studying both fatal and near-fatal incidents to learn to be better advocates and provide better resources moving forward.



## IN THIS REPORT, YOU WILL FIND RECOMMENDATIONS TO:

- Increase bed capacity using the latest software;
- Educate children about domestic violence through age-appropriate curriculum;
- Increase access to domestic violence training for our patrol officers and family violence detectives;
- Increase access to transportation for anyone seeking shelter from their abuser;
- Streamline law enforcement and bail bond practices to create better outcomes for victims of domestic violence;
- Expand our research and assistance to more victims of near-fatal violence; and
- Promote best practices to reach all the diverse communities in Dallas-Fort Worth.

**Our work to eradicate domestic violence will not end. Still we hope these recommendations set a path that will lead to a significant decrease in domestic violence incidences in the future. We are committed to continuing this work and implementing what we learn to create better outcomes for domestic violence victims.**



## INCREASING SHELTER SPACE

Adequate shelter space is a constant concern for our partner agencies. From the Domestic Violence Task Force [Annual Report in 2018](#), we know that several factors impact agencies' ability to provide space to victims, including shelter capacity. Previously, when one shelter turned away a victim, the victim would be responsible for trying to find space at a different shelter. This changed in 2019 by applying a new cloud-based software utilized throughout the DFW metroplex, [DVbeds.org](#).

DVBeds.org is the real-time shelter bed cloud-based platform that helps domestic violence survivors access open emergency shelter space with one phone call. The project includes 13 North Texas domestic violence service providers:

1. **Brighter Tomorrows**
2. **The Family Place**
3. **Genesis Women's Shelter and Support**
4. **Hope's Door - New Beginning Center**
5. **Mosaic Family Services**
6. **Peaceful Oasis - Mussarat House - Texas Muslim Women's Foundation**
7. **The Salvation Army**
8. **Denton County Friends of the Family**
9. **Grayson Crisis Center**
10. **Abigail's Arms in Gainesville**
11. **Women's Center of East Texas in Longview**
12. **Families to Freedom (non-emergency shelter program)**
13. **Chetna (non-emergency shelter program)**

When one shelter is full, the caller is transferred to the next available shelter space. [Families to Freedom provides transportation out of the Dallas area when needed.](#)

Based on the initial findings utilizing DVbeds.org, the Task Force recommends increasing single women's bed capacity as the main priority. The next version of this platform will also provide specific numbers by client type to help us determine the exact number of beds needed to reach the demand in DFW.

We look forward to updating our report when this information is released.

## TRAINING POLICE

Our patrol officers and family violence detectives receive extensive training as they begin their careers with DPD and throughout their tenure. We want to take a moment to outline current practices.

Patrol Officers receive 20 hours of Domestic Violence (DV) training in Basic Academy and new legislative update training every two years as detailed below. For students in the basic academy, in addition to lectures by Domestic Violence detectives, attorneys, and advocates, they also view up-to-date, relevant DV videos and participate in role-playing DV scenarios.

1. **Types of Abuse & Characteristics of Batterers:** The student will be able to list and describe some of the types of abuse and characteristics of batterers. The student will also recognize victims of strangulation and be cognizant of barriers facing immigrant victims.
2. **Available Assistance:** The student will be able to list assistance available to victims of Family Violence, such as Utility Deposit Waivers, Crime Victim's Compensation (CVC), and Lease termination without penalty (Property Code §92.016), shelters and outreach programs.
3. **Protective Orders:** The student will be able to list sections of the Family Code and the Code of Criminal Procedures that pertain to Protective Orders (POs) and describe the function of the different Protective Orders. The student will learn who qualifies for POs and what happens if they are violated, application procedure, conditions of bond.
4. **Reporting and Documenting:** The student will be able to describe the importance of reporting and documenting a Family Violence offense, including documenting all actual injuries and statements made by the victim, witnesses, suspect as well as observing the physical and mental state of the victim and the condition of the offense location. The student will learn the most effective way to document utilizing photographs, body worn camera, and dashcam. They will also learn the importance of the Domestic Violence Packet, which includes the Lethality Assessment.



## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DETECTIVES

5. **Identifying Predominant Aggressor:** The student will be able to identify the predominant aggressor, which starts with a thorough investigation. The student will also learn how to identify defensive injuries.
6. **Effects of Domestic Violence on Victims:** The student will understand that there is NO “typical victim” and NO “typical suspect”. Victims of domestic violence come from all walks of life, varying age groups, occupations, backgrounds, education levels, economics, cultures, ethnicities, religions and lifestyles.
7. **Common Characteristics of Domestic Violence Offenders:** The student will be able to identify common characteristics of family violence offenders and know that there is no one typical, detectable personality of an offender, but they do often display common characteristics. The student will also be introduced to theories on the causes of DV abuse.
8. **Phases of Violence:** The student will be able to identify the three phases in the cycle of violence: Honeymoon, Tension, Explosion
9. **Barriers to Leaving Abusive Relationship:** The student will be able to list examples of barriers victims face when attempting to leave an abusive relationship, such as financial dependence on the abuser, lack of a support system, the victim’s previous negative experience with the legal system, fear due to increased threats, loves the abuser, children want to stay/return
10. **Domestic Violence Statutes and Offenses:** The student will learn all relevant statutes and offenses.
11. **Officer Safety at DV Calls:** The following is discussed - approaching the scene with caution, entering the residence, what to do if no one answers the door, diffusing violence, determine if weapons are present.

1. Tour advocacy centers and shelters for instruction on shelter processes and services. Learn what steps each group takes to ensure the safety of DV victims
2. Familiarize themselves with Texas Family Code definitions related to DV offenses
3. Understand the Field-Based Reporting system as well as Reports Management System and how each supports DVU’s investigations
4. Complete a thorough investigation of cases, to include interviews of victims, witnesses, and suspects
5. Prevent the loss, destruction, or contamination of evidence and/or the loss of information
6. **Collect Evidence:** 911 tapes, surveillance video, medical records, jail phone calls, cell phone records, social media posts, etc.
7. Understand the criminal justice process from offense commission through offense adjudication
8. Constantly review local, state, and federal laws specific to DV investigation
9. Understand various types of protective orders and offenses associated with their violation and enforcement
10. Become proficient in completing prosecution reports, understanding their purpose, the need for accurate content and clarity, and the process for preparing cases for the District Attorney’s office following the completion of the report

For patrol officers, the Task Force recommends creating domestic violence training video and aides, cataloging them by topic, and posting them on Dallas PDs intranet homepage to be available indefinitely for officers to access if a refresher is needed on a certain topic. Additionally, we suggest DPD create a system to monitor and track training hours for basic training and refresher training along with a tracking system to monitor utilization of the newly created domestic violence continued education courses.

For family violence detectives, the Task Force recommends on-going training with the Domestic Violence section of the DA’s office on topics specific to the investigation and filing of their cases. We also recommend gaining access to databases such as TX Workforce Eagle Connect so that the DV Warrant Squad is better equipped to find DV offenders.

# PARTNERING WITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

With the knowledge that domestic violence impacts so many people in our community, we must partner with public schools to educate children about domestic violence, healthy relationships and the cycle of violence in an age-appropriate manner. Several of our partners are already engaging in this work including The Family Place and Brighter Tomorrows. While these programs target many children in public schools, we believe that domestic violence can be built into the curriculum to serve all children. Currently, these outside agencies must have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to come into these schools and teach these classes to select age groups.

We recommend expanding domestic violence curriculum to all grade levels and incorporating it in an age-appropriate manner that aligns with SEL TEKS. These should be taught by the teachers during the course of normal instruction throughout the year and meet children where they are developmentally. Experts should create the curriculum in the domestic violence field in collaboration with public school curriculum developers. The content could be taught to teachers by The Family Place as they have recently become an approved Continuing Professional Education (CPE) provider for Texas Educators to provide training to teachers.

**Additionally, we believe that teachers should be trained on this new curriculum during their in-service days before school begins and be offered in conjunction with domestic violence services and resources. While the curriculum is directed at students, domestic violence will likely impact many educators and there should be support available to those who need it. It may be best to do an initial roll out in a feeder pattern, and slowly expand district wide as we fine-tune the curriculum.**

# REMOVING BARRIERS TO TRANSPORTATION

Dallas Police responded to 1,288 domestic violence-related offenses alone in August 2020. Five Dallas-area domestic violence shelters report taking in 1,557 adult victims and 1,608 children in 2019. These shelters do not collect data on the method by which their survivors arrive at the shelter.

Five Dallas-based domestic violence shelter agencies, with seven shelter locations combined, offer at their own expense either a taxi ride or a rideshare service for victims to arrive if the victim has no transportation means. Two domestic violence shelter agencies that accept Dallas area victims, with four shelter locations combined, do not provide transportation for victims to arrive. Rideshare service providers, such as Lyft and Uber, do not provide assistance with installing child safety seats for victims traveling with young children and are not exempt from child passenger safety laws – thus drivers may decline to transport a victim who does not have child safety seats at the time of pick up. Taxi cabs are exempt from requiring child safety seats.

Three domestic violence shelter nonprofits received a limited amount of granted funds for rideshare service while the remaining two agencies use taxi cabs and pay for this expense out of pocket. Funding to support hired transportation is not sustainable for these shelters and is at-risk in the event of budget cuts.

Financial abuse occurs in nearly every domestic abuse case – making it nearly impossible for many victims to afford a taxicab, rideshare service, or obtain bus or train fare. Using a debit or credit card after leaving, including for transportation, exposes the victim to the risk that their abuser may track their location based on card usage. DART is legally unable to provide free transportation service for victims asking for a ride to get to or near a domestic violence shelter. To keep space available for victims most in need, domestic violence shelters often impose a deadline for the victim to arrive at the facility. Consequences for arriving too late and not maintaining contact with shelter staff about a delay may mean the victim's space at the shelter is no longer held. While most shelters give the victim several hours to arrive, and in some cases even up to 24 hours, the deadline to arrive can mean the difference between receiving safety and being revictimized.



# DECREASING THE THREAT OF SEVERE INJURY AND DEATH DUE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

We recommend that all shelters build transportation costs into their budget and/or partner with agencies that offer free transportation. All shelter agencies will operate by implementing a proactive approach for each victim's transportation needs by discussing safety plans to exit the home safely and how the victim intends to arrive to the shelter. For victims who lack means of transportation to arrive, if the shelter has no means to provide transportation, shelter hotline advocates will directly connect the caller to a ride service provider to transport the victim.

We recommend The Dallas Police Department hire a victim advocate to assist with outreach and community education about family violence and provide transportation to shelters for victims who are unable to get to a safe public place or when other transportation services are unavailable. We recommend the victim advocate be trained as a certified car seat technician to assist victims with car seat installation when needed.

In the long-term, we recommend changing current laws for ride shares to reflect those granted to taxi services that allow them to be exempt from child passenger safety laws in the event a passenger and their children are fleeing from domestic violence.

Two nonprofit ride share service providers, Families to Freedom and Helen's Project, will coordinate resources to ensure day and night availability for free ride services to victims who need a ride to a domestic violence shelter, collaborate for optimized victim services, and educate shelter staff of the process for acquiring transportation for victims.

Families to Freedom commits to provide free rides to domestic violence shelters for victims who call during weekdays, to educate taxicab drivers about being sensitive to a victim's emotional state during rides to shelter and to advise on honoring passenger and shelter confidentiality.

Helen's Project commits to provide transportation to domestic violence shelters and safe spaces with appropriate support systems with a focus on evening and weekend service. They will continue to work closely with Families to Freedom to develop round-the-clock support.

Domestic violence (DV) is pervasive in our communities, affecting one in three women and one in nine men. Since 2019, Dallas has seen an increase in violent crime, including violent crime due to family violence – a trend that is continuing in 2020. As of Sept. 21, 2020, we have seen an 8.6% increase in family violence aggravated assaults this year over last year and a high number of domestic violence homicides – 26 to date as compared to 31 at this time last year. We realize that we cannot continue addressing these crimes in the same way and expect different results.

As the Task Force was finalizing this report, an intimate partner homicide occurred that rattled the domestic violence community and emphasized the need for a different approach to handling such offenses. On Sept. 4, a woman was murdered by her estranged boyfriend. He had previously been arrested for a simple assault against her on June 21, 2020 and an aggravated assault (with a machete) against her on July 26, 2020. His records show that he had two previous convictions for burglary in Dallas County and two previous DV convictions in Smith County. Despite this extensive and violent criminal history, his bond for the June and July DV offenses combined was only set to \$35,000. At the time of the murder, he had been out of jail for less than 60 hours. Additionally, though this woman was attacked with a machete during one of the initial attacks, because she did not go to the hospital, she was not added to the Tier 1 caseload and was therefore not flagged to receive follow up from the High Risk Assessment Team housed at The Family Place.

The Task Force has four recommendations to decrease severe injury or death and potentially prevent more women in Dallas from suffering the same fate. Data from the Dallas County Fatality Review Team shows that when a victim has access to services, the risk of lethality drops to almost zero; we must therefore intervene earlier to prevent fatalities. We must also work to learn more about survivors of non-lethal intimate partner violence (IPV) and take a different approach to setting bonds and monitoring probation for offenders.



**1. Count, Study, and Support Survivors of Near-Lethal Domestic Violence Assaults.** To reduce homicides, the City of Dallas must commit to counting and studying domestic violence related homicide and near-lethal assaults at intimate partners' hands. The Fatality Review Team currently conducts confidential, system-wide reviews of intimate partner homicides and murder-suicides of adults over the age of 17, with the purpose of improving prevention and intervention services that will decrease IPV deaths in Dallas County. In order to prevent future homicides, such review should be expanded to include near-lethal assaults. To aid in these efforts, we also recommend that DPD hire an additional detective and victim advocate to work with the High-Risk Team to follow up on Tier 2 cases and connect victims to services to prevent further escalation.

**2. Provide the Lethality Assessment Profile (LAP) to Magistrate Judges and Probation Officers.** We recommend that DPD revise its internal protocols to ensure that both magistrate judges and the Dallas County Community Supervision and Corrections Department (CSCD) (Adult Probation) receive the Lethality Assessment Profile (LAP) at the earliest possible opportunity. Magistrate judges should receive the LAP as soon as practicable after an offender is arrested. Currently, a magistrate judge reviews probable cause affidavits, financial records, an offender's criminal history, and the Risk Assessment Form used by Pre-Trial Services in making a bond determination. The LAP should also be provided to magistrate judges so that they have specific information about the individualized risk to the offender's victim prior to setting bond. Although this change cannot ensure that magistrate judges would always order higher bond amounts or specific conditions in cases involving IPV, it would ensure that a magistrate judge would have made his/her decision with as much information as possible about the lethality of a specific situation.

Another way to better utilize the LAP is to ensure that it is provided to CSCD as soon as a defendant is placed on probation. Presently, CSCD receives offense reports, criminal histories, and risk assessments for offenders. Having the LAP as well would provide critical information, as well as a frame of reference, for CSCD, should the need arise for changes in probation conditions.

**3. Audit the LAP Annually.** We recommend an annual audit on each predictive question of the LAP. Such an audit should be conducted by members of the Domestic Violence Task Force to identify gaps and trends and ultimately influence protocol changes. High risk indicators should be analyzed carefully, and recommendations should be made to better utilize this tool for future victims. The Task Force should also closely monitor the number of people who refuse to participate in the LAP and find solutions to reach them in a manner they prefer.

**4. Reform the Bond Process.** We recommend identifying gaps or trends in the bond and bail systems that decrease victim safety. For example, magistrate judges in Dallas County currently use a risk assessment tool called the Public Safety Assessment (PSA) to guide Dallas County Pre-Trial Services' decisions regarding how an offender should be supervised while on bond. In the short-term, we believe there are gaps in this assessment that suggest that it alone cannot safeguard the well-being of victims; we therefore recommend that the PSA be used in conjunction with the Lethality Assessment. The PSA does not adequately address lethality in domestic violence cases thoroughly like the Lethality Assessment. In the long-term, we recommend that magistrate judges explore different risk assessment options that are designed specifically to address the risk of recidivism for domestic violence offenders. Police officers should also be encouraged to submit a High Bond Request Form if the Lethality Assessment and prior conviction information leads them to believe that an offender is at high risk of putting the victim in harm's way or poses a significant danger to the community. Additionally, we recommend a magistrate system in which representatives of both the defense and the state appear at all bond hearings. A representative of the State would ensure that any admissible evidence relevant to bond or bond condition decisions would be placed before the magistrates and would allow for a prosecutor to ask for higher bonds or more specific conditions of bond when warranted. Having defense counsel present would safeguard the rights of the accused assuring them counsel at this early stage.



# SERVING MULTICULTURAL AND DIVERSE POPULATIONS BETTER

Domestic Violence (DV) is a pervasive and extensive public health concern in the United States with long-term physical and mental health concerns; within specific marginalized and underserved populations, DV is often further hidden, unaddressed, and/or stigmatized. These multicultural and diverse survivors of domestic violence often experience additional challenges with accessing services and support needed for safety and healing from DV organizations, law enforcement and the criminal justice system, medical care providers, legal providers, social services, and other community organizations and systems. According to the [2018 Dallas Domestic Violence Task Force Report](#), survivors served in Dallas by race/ethnicity identify as: 42% Black, 30% Latinx, 21% White, 5% Other, and 2% Asian.

However, these statistics do not fully capture or reflect the issues and intersectionality of other types of diversity categories that are addressed in this report, including age, sexual orientation, national origin, immigrant/refugee status, disability, religion, and more.

It is important for organizations to identify, understand, and address the additional unique barriers specific populations experience when seeking out services for domestic violence support. Some of the challenges that exist are detailed below; however, it is essential to conduct internal evaluation within communities to ensure not only that DV survivor's voices are heard but also that systemic, organizational changes are made to become more inclusive.

## ORGANIZATIONAL AND STRUCTURAL CULTURAL BARRIERS

- » Lack of visibility and representation of multicultural and diverse populations and their issues (i.e. outreach and publicity materials, policies, training materials, solidarity/allyship)
- » Lack of access due to language and communication barriers, physical space and other accommodations needed to serve multicultural and diverse populations
- » Lack of knowledge and/or established partnerships with organizations and networks within specific multicultural and diverse communities, which results in a lack of referral opportunities and knowledge around the availability and resources for further support
- » Lack of awareness or understanding of the distinct history, culture, and experiences of specific multicultural and diverse populations
- » Relying on biases, judgments, myths and stereotypes which can contribute to misunderstanding or minimizing the survivor's risk, victimization, and needs
- » Denying or refusing services or assistance due to survivor being a part of a specific multicultural or diverse population
- » Lack of awareness, acknowledgment, understanding, response, and/or support from and within specific diverse communities to domestic violence due to cultural history, norms, beliefs, etc.

## INDIVIDUAL AND INTERPERSONAL CULTURAL BARRIERS

- » Lack of awareness or understanding of domestic violence and available support and/or perception DV is not happening or addressed in their specific community
- » Previous or anticipated negative experiences with reporting and support services such as concerns about discrimination, "anti-" sentiment, not being believed or taken seriously, or being blamed due to being a part of a specific cultural or diverse population
- » Fear of police or authority figures and incriminating partners and/or family members
- » Increased dependence on abuser and others due to cultural barriers and challenges
- » Additional trauma, lower confidence or self-esteem, and/or mental health impact due to negative experiences from being part of a specific multicultural or diverse population(s)



# RECOMMENDATIONS

- » Recommend that DVTF members and other organizations include statements, language, images, and/or stories and resources that reflect inclusivity and non-discrimination of multicultural and diverse survivors on website, social media, and other publications and materials. See suggested text below:
  - The Domestic Violence Task Force acknowledges the importance of removing barriers to serve individuals who have been marginalized and oppressed as a result of their race, ethnicity, language spoken, immigration or refugee status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, age, religion, and more. In order to do so, honest reflective evaluation of the implicit barriers to services must be explored, identified, and addressed to continue serving victims of intimate partner violence. DVTF commits to be an inclusive, equitable, and diversity-focused organization emphasizing the importance of dismantling abusive behaviors in order to serve all victims of domestic violence.
- » Recommend that DVTF members and other organizations include appropriate training focused on multicultural and diverse survivors for their own staff and within the domestic violence training curriculums recommendations (i.e. Dallas Police Department and Dallas Independent School District)
- » Recommend that DVTF members and other organizations build connections, and mutual partnerships and collaboration with organizations within and serving specific multicultural and diverse communities for a coordinated community response.
- » Recommend that DVTF members and other organizations should conduct organizational evaluations and assessments to identify areas of improvement for access, services, referrals, and outreach to multicultural and diverse survivors. If organizations do not have the capacity to serve specific populations, they are encouraged to identify and provide resources and/or connections to other more appropriate organizations.

These recommendations aim to address and remove the barriers and challenges previously identified and to improve prevention, intervention, and outreach services provided by DVTF members and other organizations. Toolkits and resource materials will be provided in the final sections in this report.

- » Recommend that DVTF and this subcommittee continue to exist to support implementation and conduct an assessment to further understand the needs of multicultural and diverse survivors in the Dallas community in the next year or longer as needed.
  - If the taskforce and/or these subcommittees will not continue, then this focus area and recommendations should continue through another domestic violence coalition such as the Family Violence Prevention or Domestic Violence Awareness and/or other broader committee, coalitions, efforts focused on multicultural and diverse communities.
- » Recommend each Task Force implemented within the City of Dallas encourage inclusivity, and multicultural and diverse representation.

**For extensive background on the need to better serve our multicultural and diverse survivors and a list of available resources, please see the full 2018 report [here](#).**

## CONCLUSION

**To address the problems of domestic violence, we must think upstream to address the problems before they start and fix current systems that slow the path to justice for victims, address inefficiencies that grant too much leeway to perpetrators, and remove barriers to access for people of all backgrounds. We believe the Task Force should continue as an Advisory Council on Domestic Violence to give our partners the opportunity to implement the recommendations made here. Domestic violence is a systemic issue in our City and will require constant advocacy and increased awareness from all members of our community.**

