



TESTIMONY RE: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION  
BEFORE THE SENATE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE  
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May 22, 2023

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Thank you, Chair Muth and Senator Schwank for holding a hearing today to raise awareness about domestic violence, the resources available for victims and survivors, and the unmet needs that remain barriers to victim safety in the Commonwealth. My name is Deanna Dyer, and I am a survivor of gender-based violence, a domestic violence advocate, and an attorney with over 18 years invested in the movement to end gender-based violence. I currently serve as the Policy Director at the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV), the state contractor for domestic violence services in Pennsylvania. PCADV is the oldest statewide domestic violence coalition in the nation.

PCADV's network of 59 local domestic violence programs provides free and confidential services to nearly 90,000 victims, survivors, and their children each year. We envision a Commonwealth where all Pennsylvanians are supported in the human right to live healthy, stable, and rewarding lives free from domestic violence and all forms of violence and oppression. This vision is the compass for our work and pervades our priorities: prevention, intervention, and change. We also recognize that the systems victims and survivors need to navigate in their path to safety are inherently challenging and disproportionately stacked against people of color. We strive to make these systems more equitable for all, especially the most marginalized.

## I. Frequency and Dynamics of Domestic Violence

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men have experienced severe physical violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime. The CDC has indicated that domestic

violence is our nation's number one public health issue with devastating physical, emotional, financial and societal consequences, affecting over 10 million men and women every year. Today I will use the term "domestic violence," but we know many terms are used interchangeably to describe the same behaviors. It may also be referred to as: abuse, battery, intimate partner violence, or family, spousal, relationship, or dating violence. I will use the term "victim" and "survivor" interchangeably with the understanding that empowerment-based advocacy follows the lead of those impacted and mirrors the language they use to identify themselves. While some people who have experienced domestic violence identify as victims, others identify as survivors.

Domestic violence is a pattern of coercive behavior used by one person to gain power and control over another in an intimate or familial relationship. The tactics of abuse used to gain this control vary and can include financial and economic abuse, emotional abuse, spiritual abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, digital abuse, sexual coercion, reproductive coercion, and stalking, among others. These tactics of abuse can manifest in different ways and multiple types of abuse usually occur in an abusive relationship.

While physical abuse is one of the most easily identified types of abuse, when it is used, it is most often to reinforce the regular use of other, more subtle types of abuse. Financial or economic abuse, for example, happens when one intimate partner has control over the other partner's ability to access, acquire, use or maintain economic resources, which diminishes the victim's capacity to support themselves and forces intentional dependence. While economic abuse and other abusive behaviors are often harder to identify, they are just as serious as physical abuse. Yet, 78% of Americans don't recognize financial abuse as domestic violence. The reality is economic abuse occurs in 99% of abusive relationships and is the number one reason victims stay in or return to abusive relationships.

Common tactics of financial or economic abuse include:

- 1) preventing survivors from using their financial resources, like not allowing access to bank accounts or hiding joint assets;

- 2) preventing survivors from obtaining or maintaining employment, which can include a range of behaviors, from directly harassing the survivor at the workplace, to subtly causing the survivor to be late, or miss or leave work through things like sabotaging the car so there is no mode of transportation; and/or
- 3) exploiting survivors' resources to limit their financial and life options, like pressuring a survivor to sign financial documents resulting in coerced debt, while keeping all assets in the abuser's name.

The impacts of financial abuse are devastating not just for the victims and survivors themselves, but also for their communities and for society at large. Victims of financial abuse lose a total of 8 million days of paid work each year. The estimated overall workplace productivity costs are \$1.3 trillion.

## II. Domestic Violence Resources in Pennsylvania

In response to the nearly universal experience of economic abuse among domestic violence victims, PCADV created its Economic Justice and Empowerment Initiative ("The Initiative"), which works to address the impacts of financial abuse. Like other PCADV's program services, The Initiative is a multi-faceted, statewide coordinated effort between PCADV and our network of 59 community-based domestic violence programs. The primary goal of The Initiative is to help domestic violence victims overcome immediate economic barriers and secure long-term financial independence and safety. In addition to these efforts, PCADV's centers provide free and confidential direct services to victims of domestic violence and their children in all 67 counties of the Commonwealth. The services our programs offer are tailored to each survivor's needs, but often include crisis counseling, safety planning, legal representation and/or advocacy, and support accessing safe, stable housing. Our programs also operate 24/7 domestic violence crisis hotlines and emergency safe shelters. My colleague also testifying on this panel, Beth Garrigan, who leads Safe Berks, PCADV's member program in Berks County, will discuss in further detail the tailored services programs offer domestic violence victims.

We also know domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women and their children in the Commonwealth. While victims face many challenges when trying to leave an abusive relationship, access to safe and affordable housing is one of the most significant barriers victims encounter. Because no survivor should have to choose between homelessness or staying with an abusive partner, PCADV works with our member programs to implement the Rapid Re-housing (RRH) program. RRH is a rental assistance program that provides a tangible solution to address the reality survivors often face. Rental assistance is short-term, usually between six and twelve months, but is flexible and highly tailored to each survivor's needs. RRH paired with domestic violence advocacy supports survivors in obtaining and maintaining housing stability. The domestic violence programs that are a part of this project offer support through the lens of domestic violence housing first philosophy, which focuses on first getting survivors into stable housing with ongoing support as they rebuild their lives. This support is provided without any prerequisites and services are specific to the needs of each individual survivor, which we know is the proven key to ensuring long-term victim safety.

### III. Unmet Needs and Barriers to Safety

We know what it takes to prevent domestic violence because when we listen to survivors, they tell us what they need to keep themselves safe. Essentially every victim with whom every advocate has ever spoken tells us that obtaining economic independence is what they need to leave an abusive relationship and stay gone. The data supports this assertion: financial self-sufficiency is one of the best predictors of whether a victim will be able to stay away from their abuser. It makes sense. Survivors lose nearly \$53,000 in wages over their lifetime. The lack of paid sick days or other job protections prevents survivors from taking time off work to recover from injury, seek safety, or pursue a court case.

Yet, flexible funding for programs to support victims' access to transportation, childcare, durable goods, and other necessities is incredibly limited. Last year, PCADV applied for Pennsylvania Housing Affordability and Rehabilitation Enhancement (PHARE) funding to support 30 domestic violence programs

working to help victims achieve economic independence, but due to the cap on PHARE funding, only 16% of the demonstrated need was awarded.

PCADV continuously seeks to identify other funding streams to support the overall goal of RRH to support the range of survivors' needs that contribute to housing and financial stability. Nonetheless, in a single 24-hour period in Pennsylvania, 166 requests from domestic violence victims for emergency shelter, hotels, emergency relocation, and other housing needs to PCADV programs were unmet due to a lack of funding. That's an average of 5,000 unmet service requests per month.

As our colleagues will discuss on the next panel, we know having a lawyer is a critical support for a domestic violence victim. Victims with legal representation are significantly more likely to obtain all appropriate court ordered provisions to ensure safety for themselves and their children. Nonetheless, imperative civil legal representation is unavailable to victims in over two-thirds of the Commonwealth. Currently only 22 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties have specific Civil Legal Representation Projects for domestic violence victims, creating a potentially lethal gap in services in the remaining 45 counties across the Commonwealth.

#### IV. Meeting the Need

To provide the lifesaving services I have discussed, PCADV and its programs rely on appropriations in the state budget allocated to the Department of Human Services through Act 44. Domestic violence programs are at a tipping point, nearing a financial crisis that threatens the ability to keep their doors open to welcome victims who are fleeing life-threatening violence in their own homes. Increasing the Act 44 domestic violence line item in the budget by \$4M in FY23-24 will begin to fill gaps paramount to ensuring victim safety. As allocated through PCADV's funding formula, a \$4M increase in the Act 44 budget line item would range from programs receiving approximately an additional \$5,678 to \$447,310 to balance their budgets and keep their doors open for victims fleeing violence.

This funding increase is crucial considering the current typical salary for a domestic violence advocate in Pennsylvania is below a living wage. Advocates fill positions that require them to manage high-

stress, secondary-trauma, and inflexible schedules to ensure 24/7 service provision. Last year, PCADV programs had 431 advocates vacate their positions and were only able to rehire 371 new advocates to fill these positions. That equates to every domestic violence program in Pennsylvania being understaffed, with an average of 7 vacancies per program in a single year. This unprecedented domestic violence victim advocate shortage is a product of underfunding whereby programs are unable to offer competitive salaries to recruit and retain skilled advocates, resulting in victims being placed on longer waitlists or survivors not receiving the services they need when they need them. In 2022 there were an astounding 3,209 unmet requests for services.

## V. Conclusion

PCADV is grateful to Chair Muth and Senator Schwank for the opportunity to speak with you today to raise awareness about domestic violence and its prevalence. While advocates across the Commonwealth work hard to make vital resources available to survivors in our communities, critical unmet needs remain. We hope you will join us by urging your colleagues to support filling these gaps through an increase in Act 44 domestic violence appropriations.