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Domestic Violence Oversight Board 2021 Annual Report

Domestic Violence Oversight Board

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Mission Statement

***To ensure that Miami-Dade County has a streamlined, diligent,
and ethical system to address domestic violence***

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Introduction

The Domestic Violence Oversight Board (DVOB) appreciates the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) and the Mayor for their continued support of our work, and for upholding that domestic violence is a public health crisis in our community. The DVOB is grateful for the BCC's adoption of the DVOB's recommendations in previous years' reports. The actions of County leadership in addressing domestic violence as a priority in its policies, legislation, and funding is a valuable and powerful reality that communicates to the community and more importantly, victims and survivors that its actions are aligned with its words. For this, we thank you.

In July 2020, the DVOB submitted to the BCC and the Mayor, its 2020 Annual Report (the Report). While the recommendations in the Report have yet to be officially adopted by the BCC, we are hopeful they will be. The DVOB is pleased to submit this 2021 Annual Report (the Report) and respective recommendations for BCC adoption pursuant to the mandate in Ordinance #94-156.

Executive Summary

A Year in Review- Lessons Learned, Challenges and Opportunities

1. The Double Pandemic; COVID-19 and Domestic Violence; Flexibility and Creativity: The DVOB remained actively informed and educated on all matters related to domestic violence during 2021. The issues impacting survivors and the systems of care serving them continued to be a focus of the board's work during the COVID19 Pandemic and subsequent year. At a time where domestic violence incidents were rising, service modifications called for creative mobile advocacy, culturally relevant, victim centered services and the provision of the most basic needs and safety. The lessons learned listed on pages 8-13 in this Report describe the service modifications required of and implemented by providers and advocates to serve survivors and their families more effectively during times of COVID-19. The victim centered approach to services became even more critical during federal, state, and local stay-at-home orders, emergency declarations and restrictions. Flexibility, technology, and meeting survivors' needs, acknowledging their unique and very individual situations, while providing for basic needs, and keeping them safe and alive, became a staple of the domestic violence provider community's activities. The service response, outreach efforts and awareness campaigns on page 10 of the Report, acknowledged that survivors remained on lockdown with the abuser. The message clearly communicated to survivors, their families, and the community at large was that survivors were not alone; help and services were available and accessible.

2. Food & Beverage Tax Performance: Countywide restaurant closures and COVID-19 restrictions during the pandemic and its subsequent variants resulted in a notable decrease in revenues from the Food & Beverage Tax collections. Page 8 describes the 2021 performance of the Food & Beverage Tax for Domestic Violence. It includes projected and actual revenues collected and expenses supported by the fund. Attachment 1 is the proforma for the Domestic Violence portion of the Food & Beverage Tax prepared by the Miami-Dade County Office of Management and Budget.

3. Reduced Shelter Capacity and Increased Need: COVID-19 restrictions added to the challenges in services and emphasized the importance of safe rapid rehousing and transitional housing programming described on page 9.

4. Opportunities: The lack of safe and affordable housing in Miami-Dade County continued to significantly impact both the domestic violence and homeless continua of care, preventing those fleeing domestic violence and seeking shelter from being placed and providing them with lifesaving shelter from violence. Survivors in domestic violence shelters and transitional housing programs also faced the challenge of successfully accessing safe and affordable housing.

With this reality, as detailed on page 9, our partners at the Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust secured funding from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (USHUD), Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES ACT), the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the Florida State Office of Homelessness, to increase permanent housing for survivors of domestic violence. We appreciate the federal government's prioritization and dedication of resources for those fleeing domestic violence. We equally appreciate the Homeless Trust's efforts to secure these critical funding streams and their work with local domestic violence providers to help survivors be permanently housed.

5. Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services: Advocacy services are the lifeline of interventions helping victims of IPV and often end the violence in their lives. Pages 10-13 describe the various areas within a strong coordinated community response to IPV where advocates play a critical role. In specific, this section of the report details the many services of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit of Florida's domestic violence division. One of those services includes the presence of victim advocates in each of the domestic violence intake courts throughout Miami-Dade County, where survivors seek injunctions for protections from the court. In late 2021, the DVOB learned a series of important matters regarding the status of the advocates at these five domestic violence intake units. Attachment 2 is the DVOB's Court Advocacy Services Report highlighting the various victim advocate positions across Miami-Dade County, respective salaries and benefits, recruitment, and retainment issues. The DVOB at its March 2022 meeting agreed to include this in this Report resulting in DVOB Resolution 2022-1 (Attachment 3) urging the BCC and Mayor for salary parity for the Miami-Dade County CAHSD victim advocate positions. The corresponding recommendation is found on page 20 of this report.

6. Pro Bono Immigration Services for Survivors: Pages 12-13 discuss the importance of pro bono immigration services for immigrant survivors. Immigrant and specifically, undocumented women are particularly vulnerable to IPV, as abusers use their undocumented immigration status to further control and terrorize them. Abuse among immigrant women is as high as 49.8%, almost three times the national average. The DVOB's recommendation regarding the need for this service is found on page 21 of this report.

Accomplishments

Listed on pages 13 through 17 are the year's accomplishments. We are pleased with what has been accomplished in and by our community and partners regarding domestic violence. We are grateful to the Board of County Commissioners and Mayor for their support and for helping us achieve them. We could not have done so without that support.

Recommendations: This 2021 Annual Report is comprised of a total of eight recommendations. They include two new (*) and 6 carryover (**) recommendations from the DVOB's 2020 Annual Report. They can be found on pages 17-21. Below is a summary of the 2021 DVOB recommendations to the BCC and Mayor.

Recommendations- Legislative Advocacy

**** 1. Federal: Elimination of Cap on U Visas- Background:** As a result of the DVOB's COVID-19 High Risk Populations Workgroup findings, the DVOB agreed it is necessary for the United States Congress to eliminate the cap on U Visas that can be issued each year.

Congress created the U nonimmigrant visa with the passage of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (including the Battered Immigrant Women's Protection Act) in October 2000. The U nonimmigrant status (U visa) is set aside for victims of certain crimes who have suffered mental or physical abuse and are helpful to law enforcement or government officials in the investigation or prosecution of criminal activity. The legislation is intended to strengthen the ability of law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute cases of domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking of noncitizens and other crimes, while also protecting victims of crimes. The legislation also helps law enforcement agencies to better serve these victims.

Federal law limits U visas to 10,000 annually, which has resulted in a backlog of visas in the hundreds of thousands and causing a 5-to-six-year backlog for processing. This cap forces victims to remain in legal limbo regarding their legal status in the United States. **Recommendation: Urge U.S. Congress to Eliminate Cap on U Visas.** The DVOB recommends that the Board of County Commissioners adopt legislation urging the United States Congress to pass legislation eliminating the cap on the number of U visas that can be issued each year.

**** 2. State: U Visas- Lack of Uniform Statewide Certification Process-Background:** The law enforcement certification USCIS Form I918, Supplement B, U Nonimmigrant Status Certification (Form I-918B) is a required element for U visa applications. The certification "is a required piece of evidence to confirm that a qualifying crime has occurred and that the victim was helpful, is being helpful, or is likely to be helpful in the detection, investigation, or prosecution of criminal activity," according to the U Visa Law Enforcement Certification Resource Guide.

Although the law enforcement certification is required for a victim to be eligible for a U visa, law enforcement agencies have discretion whether to provide the certification or not. Further, in Florida, there is no uniform state system for the certification of U Visas requests. Therefore, certification requests in some counties are processed quickly while requests in other counties sit idle, preventing a victim's certification process to commence. **Recommendation: Urge the Florida Legislature to create a uniform system for the certification of U-Visas:** The DVOB recommends that the State establish, as the law permits, a uniform state system for processing law enforcement U visa certification requests using Form I-918B U, or its successor.

**** 3. State: Expansion of the F&B Tax to Beach Municipalities-Background:** Per Section 212.0306 of the Florida Statutes, the Beach Municipalities, consisting of Miami Beach, Surfside, and Bal Harbor, were exempt from participating in the F&B Tax. This exemption was granted to avoid the burden of additional taxation, given these municipalities levied and continue to levy a Resort Tax.

In November of 2021, Miami Beach voters approved a non-binding ballot measure supporting that Miami Beach submit a resolution to the State to amend Section 212.0306 of the Florida Statutes to expand and include the Beach Municipalities in the participation of the F&B Tax. **Recommendation: Expand the F&B Tax to the Beach Municipalities.** The DVOB urges the BCC to continue to include in Miami-Dade County's legislative priorities that the Florida Legislature and the Miami-Dade County Legislative Delegation work to amend and expand the local option Food and Beverage Tax to include the Beach Municipalities.

**** 4. State: Florida Crisis Shelter Protection Act- Background:** During the 19-20 Legislative Session, the Florida Crisis Protection Act (House Bill 1397; Senate Bill 1754) failed to pass. The Bill would exempt domestic violence centers, youth shelters, homeless and hurricane evacuation shelter operators from third party litigation. Operations of these shelters and particularly the liability insurance costs have become prohibitive and will render shelters uninsurable. **Recommendation: Urge the Florida Legislature to pass the Florida Crisis Shelter Protection Act.** The DVOB urges the BCC to include this Act in the upcoming Miami-Dade County's legislative priorities. The Bill would exempt domestic violence centers, youth shelters, homeless and hurricane evacuation shelter operators from third party litigation. Operations of these shelters, particularly the cost of liability insurance has become prohibitive and will render shelters uninsurable.

**** 5. Local: Miami Beach Funding to DVOB- Background:** In October 2019, the City of Miami Beach approved Resolution # 2019-31082 providing \$125,000 for two fiscal years each to the DVOB for domestic violence services. **Recommendation: The DVOB seeks a BCC sponsor for this item and urges the BCC to approve receipt of this urgently needed funding for victims of Domestic Violence.**

**** 6. Domestic Violence Oversight Board Trust Fund- Background:** The DVOB at its March 2021 Board meeting approved the activation of its Community Education and Collaboration Committee to identify the scope of the work of this committee and create a communication plan accordingly. The intent is to educate the community, stakeholders, policy makers, and victims on the issues of Domestic Violence, the resources in place for victims and their and dependent children. The DVOB Trust Fund will support the efforts of the Committee's work and activities. **Recommendation: The DVOB seeks BCC sponsorship and approval of the DVOB Trust Fund for the purpose of supporting the activities of the Community Education and Outreach Committee to raise awareness of Domestic Violence and resources in our community.**

***7. Salary and Benefits Parity for Victim Advocates- Background:** In late December 2021, the DVOB received an inquiry from a member of the public regarding the absence of advocacy services at one of the domestic violence intake units. The DVOB discussed this inquiry with its partners, the 11th Judicial Circuit Court, Domestic Violence Division, Community Action and Human Services Department (CAHSD), Miami-Dade County State Attorney's Office (SAO), Survivors' Pathway Corporation, Miami-Dade County Police Department, Special Victims Bureau, and Miami Beach Police Department, Criminal Investigation Division. **Recommendation: Funding for salary and benefits parity It is the agreement and consensus that the current need for victim advocacy services is attributed to resources and funding. Salary levels and disparity between agencies in pay ranges must be addressed, further explored, and resolved. In discussions with most, a starting annual salary of no less than \$60,000 with benefits seems to be a reasonable start.**

* **8. Pro Bono Immigration Services for Survivors: Background:** While there are various resources of pro bono services designed to assist survivors of domestic violence in Miami-Dade County, there is a higher demand than capacity. Survivors are often forced to go without this critical service within our coordinated community response to IPV. Often, there is a three to four month waiting list and, in some cases, the reduced fees for the required filing are not affordable to survivors. **Recommendation:** **The DVOB recommends Miami-Dade County allocate funding in the upcoming FY Budget for Pro Bono immigration services for survivors of IPV in the amount of \$2.5M to serve at least 1000 survivors through direct legal representation and monthly outreach educational individual and group sessions.** These outreach educational sessions would be offered throughout organizations serving DV survivors who do not yet have lawful status, or need to adjust status, connecting them to direct legal representation.

A Year in Review- Lessons Learned, Challenges and Opportunities

COVID-19 Response- The Double Pandemic: Domestic Violence & COVID-19 Response: Domestic violence and COVID-19 remain global public health crises. Unfortunately, Miami-Dade County is no exception. We learned that COVID-19 restrictions and social distancing requirements exacerbated the crisis. Victims continue to be at home with their batterers and are more isolated than ever. The number of individuals getting sick, facing unemployment, food and housing insecurity creates the perfect environment for increased violence, campaigns of fear, and lethality for victims and their children. As in the past, access to safe, affordable housing, rental assistance, food, and other immediate and basic needs continue to be at the core of services benefiting and needed by the community, victims, and their families.

Food & Beverage (F&B) Tax Performance- The F&B Tax performance has been significantly impacted by COVID-19 restrictions and Safer at Home orders. In FY 2019-20, revenues decreased 25.87% from FY 2018-19, with monthly double-digit declines beginning in April 2020 and continuing through January 2021. In late 2021, revenues began to improve but are projected to come in below prior years. In FY 20-21, total revenues were down 23.36% from the prior year. However, in the first five months of FY 21-22, revenues are up 62.53% from the previous year with \$2,344,902.48 collected thus far exclusively for the construction and operations of domestic violence centers.

Increased demand for affordable safe housing is causing a significant impact on the domestic violence continuum of care. It prevents those in shelters and transitional housing programs to exit successfully to safe permanent and affordable housing and move forward with their lives. It also impacts those individuals in need of safe shelter.

The DVOB has over \$14.5 million in reserves. The proforma (Attachment #1), prepared by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), projects funding for the construction of a third domestic violence center will be available in FY 32-33. Since the commencement of F&B Tax collections, \$67,444,874.00 have been dedicated to the construction and operations of domestic violence shelters to exclusively support persons fleeing domestic violence.

Demand for affordable, safe housing continues to significantly impact the domestic violence continuum of care. It prevents those in domestic violence shelters and transitional housing programs, often extremely low-income households, from successfully exiting to permanent homes and rebuilding their lives. It also impacts those newly in need of crisis housing from timely accessing safe shelter.

Reduced capacity and increased need: The provision of shelter and advocacy services continue, with modifications. Programs and providers follow COVID-19 restrictions, guided by local, state, and national health experts. It is important to note that while domestic violence incidents increased during the pandemic, at times, requests for services were eerily quiet, particularly as shelter capacity was reduced. During pre-pandemic times, shelters placed, family size and composition permitting, two families per room. Since early 2020 to present day, shelters place one family per room. This policy remains in place today.

Opportunities: With this understanding, our partner, the Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust has worked with the United States Housing and Urban Development (US HUD), the State Office of Homelessness, and Miami-Dade County's four Public Housing Agencies (Miami-Dade, Hialeah, Miami Beach and Homestead) and domestic violence programs to make more permanent housing available for survivors.

A portion of Emergency Solutions Grant-Coronavirus funding and Emergency Housing Vouchers, made available through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES ACT) and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) respectively, were directed exclusively to victims of domestic violence.

The Homeless Trust was also successful in securing nearly \$3.2 million from US HUD as part of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Continuum of Care Program Competition to fund two new domestic violence bonus projects. Together, these two projects are anticipated to serve 94 survivors of domestic violence and their families, up to 233 people, with permanent housing.

1. **Miami-Dade County Rapid Rehousing and Domestic Violence Project:** Miami-Dade County Community Action and Human Service's Rapid Rehousing Domestic Violence Project will serve 57 households, or 105 people, fleeing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking and human trafficking, including 32 families, 20 unaccompanied adults and 5 unaccompanied youth. The project will provide short- to medium-term rental assistance with supportive services that focus on safety planning and housing sustainability.
2. **Transitions to Homeownership Expansion (THOP Expansion):** Carrfour Supportive Housing's THOP Expansion is a rapid rehousing program serving persons fleeing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The project will provide 37 households, or 128 people with rental assistance and supportive services, allowing them to move quickly and safely to housing in the community while addressing their needs and enabling them to rebuild their lives.

Flexibility and Creativity: Victims faced a double pandemic, domestic violence, and COVID-19. Providers were challenged with having to pivot to mobile advocacy, virtual outreach, and creative service delivery. We lost the in-person interaction that is the critical and necessary ingredient to establish and foster trust between the victim and providers. As the pandemic and domestic violence continue to co-exist, we recognize that flexibility and creativity in approaches to service delivery are crucial for maintaining a strong and effective response to IPV. While mobile advocacy in the domestic violence field is not new, this pandemic has forced advocates, domestic violence courts, providers, government, and communities to meet survivors in ways we had not planned, and for which we had not budgeted. The Domestic Violence Division of the Courts proactively adapted and modified its services to victims. Hearings continue to be conducted using technology, and support is available for those heads of households who have no other choice but to have their children with them during a court procedure, either in person, or virtually. Mobile advocacy and the quick pivot to technology, advocacy support and other innovative approaches continue to be more essential than ever. In addition, families and shelter program participants who contract COVID-19 while in shelter are offered hotel or alternative placement and advocacy services during their isolation and quarantine period.

Community Awareness and Outreach: Early in 2020, it became readily apparent that victims needed to know they were not alone, that help was available, and how to access such help. Key community partners collaborated and launched various campaigns to address domestic violence during COVID-19. The Office of the State Attorney, in collaboration with Miami-Dade County, and The Women's Fund, through their respective campaigns, ensured victims there was help, and where, and how to find it. Finding a sound way to maintain safety while providing this mobile advocacy is critical. Ensuring those with little to no technological resources or skills had access to technology was both a factor considered in the campaign design and service modification. These campaigns ensure that victims and the community at large remain informed about the service modifications and more importantly, deliver a clear and resounding message that victims were not alone, and that services are available. The campaign also included new ways (Quick Response Code) to facilitate victims' access to services.

Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services: Victim advocacy services are critical and required services for a community to have an effective coordinated community response (CCR) to domestic violence. These services are provided mainly through CAHSD and Survivors' Pathway, Corporation, as well as the respective law enforcement victim advocates most municipalities have. These services continue, albeit modified. Training is also offered to victims in the various programs throughout the system and includes the very relevant and needed training on the use of technology.

Victim advocacy services are the lifeline of interventions helping victims of IPV, and often end the violence in their lives. Victim advocates are found in community-based organizations and in the criminal justice system. Certified victim advocates are protected by privilege and their work with and on behalf of victims is confidential and protected by statute from compelled disclosure. Victim advocacy is trauma informed and victim centered. It is based on learning, knowing, and acknowledging the victim's lived experiences. A victim advocate is mindful of the victim's individuality and safety concerns. Victim advocates help victims understand their role as they navigate thorough and negotiate with complex systems that include housing, physical and mental health needs, financial resources, and child matters.

Advocates help make legal options more accessible for victims. Advocates support the victim with conflicting feelings about their abusive relationship. Advocates at times have lived experiences of abusive relationships and know how important it is for victims to be heard and understood. Finally, advocacy services include self-help groups that offer important support to victims in ending abuse in their relationships.

The 11th Judicial Circuit of Florida, Domestic Violence Division: The 11th Judicial Circuit of Florida created a domestic violence division comprised of seven judges and support services to deal exclusively with family violence issues and effectively addressing this type of crime through the justice system. The Domestic Violence Division hears protection (restraining) order cases, violation of injunction cases, criminal misdemeanor cases involving family violence and risk protection order cases. The court mandates accountability, punishment, and meaningful treatment. Case managers assist the judges with preparation of injunction orders, time-sharing schedules and child support when the parties have minor children in common, specialized court orders and case management. The Division Judges and support personnel are located at the Lawson E. Thomas Courthouse Center; however, some injunction cases are filed at three Branch Court locations. Seven judges in the Branch Court locations hear these cases in addition to their assignments in other divisions. Below is a summary of the other services provided within the Domestic Violence Division of the 11th Judicial Circuit. Below are the various services and programs provided through the 11th Judicial Circuit Court.

Domestic Violence Civil Case Management Unit: The Domestic Violence Case Management Unit provides immediate assistance, referrals, case assessment, support, and coordination. The unit serves as a liaison between the judiciary, related agencies, and the public.

Court Care: provides a safe and supervised drop-in childcare facility for children who must be in court in connection with matters involving the children or their parents or guardians.

Department of Translation and Interpretation: Court Interpreters interpret and translate verbal and written communications from a non-English to English language in court proceedings.

Pro Bono Legal Services- A Joint Pro Bono Project of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit, Dade Legal Aid, and the Dade County Bar Association: DVOB discussion included exploring the recruitment of Miami-Dade County's major private law firms to provide pro bono work as a solution to the court advocacy services. This type of court representation is not the gap being experienced when referring to court advocacy services. The gap in court advocacy services is previously described under Victim Advocacy Services section of this communication and not legal representation. The Put Something Back Pro Bono Project is the official program for providing pro bono, or free legal assistance to the needy population of Miami-Dade County. It is designed to increase access to the civil legal system by serving as an umbrella agency for referral to all other legal service providers and as a clearinghouse for attorneys who volunteer to help the indigent of the community.

Through this project, clients are referred to volunteer attorneys experienced in a wide range of legal matters, including: family cases; children's matters requiring Guardians Ad Litem in family, juvenile dependency, domestic violence, probate and civil court; consumer and housing concerns; domestic violence permanent injunction matters; general Civil issues; social security and veterans benefits; employment matters; the preparation and processing of Wills; and, non-fee generating civil court cases.

Since 1992, the program has handled thousands of cases and recruited thousands of attorneys, including private, corporate, and public law firms who have signed up to assist. It is the largest and most comprehensive pro bono project in Florida.

Domestic Violence Intake Units: Operated through the joint efforts of the Clerk of Courts (COC), and CAHSD, the Intake Unit is comprised of victim advocates from CAHSD and Survivors' Pathway Corporation. Intake counselors and support staff also provide efficient and responsive services to the court and the community. Countywide, there are five Domestic Violence Intake /Outreach Units within the 11th Judicial Court 's Domestic Violence Division. Listed below are their locations.

- Hialeah District Court
- Joseph Caleb Center Court
- Lawson E. Thomas Courthouse Center
- North Dade Justice Center
- South Dade Justice Center

CAHSD's Coordinated Victims Assistance Center, (CVAC) is our community's (and only such center in the state) one stop family justice center. Through its partners, CAHSD provides over 38 services to survivors of IPV, Sexual Assault (SA) and Human Trafficking (HT). CVAC also serves as an additional domestic violence civil intake unit, with 5 designated attorneys assisting victims in filing for and representation with requests for orders for protection or Injunctions for Protection (IFP).

Pre and Post COVID-19 Court Services and Modifications: Pre pandemic, victim advocates from CAHSD and Survivors' Pathway Corporation were located at the DV Intake Units on a regular basis, during regular work hours. The courts, and as such, the DV Intake units, do not operate on a 24 hours /7 days per week basis. In response to the pandemic, placement of victim advocates at the DV Intake Units were modified and advocacy services assisted individuals with virtual meetings and hearings taking place during stay-at-home orders and beyond. Currently, the court is operating a hybrid model of virtual (through Zoom) and in person (at the courthouses) hearings. There is a dedicated section on their website <https://www.jud11.flcourts.org/> providing COVID-19 updates to the community.

Pro Bono Immigration Services for Survivors: Intimate partner violence (IPV) impacts 1 in 3 women, but immigrant and undocumented women are particularly vulnerable to intimate partner violence as abusers often use their undocumented partner's immigration status as a means of control. Abuse rates among immigrant women are as high as 49.8%. This is almost three times the national average.

Domestic violence survivors face many challenges when attempting to obtain safety and recover from abuse. Survivors who are immigrants to the United States face additional barriers that make obtaining safety and security difficult. It is important to understand domestic violence issues specific to immigrants and how immigrant survivors can be identified, accompanied through the legal system, and access options for safety and stability for themselves and their children.

Abusers may manipulate and distort beliefs held by the immigrant survivors themselves. Immigrant survivors may believe that contacting law enforcement leads to being detained and/or deported. They may fear losing their immigration status, or that, if they don't have immigration status, they will lose custody of U.S. citizen children.

The abuser may threaten to kidnap the children and take them to another country. They may be concerned that reporting abuse may lead to the abuser's deportation, and or the abuser will retaliate against family members in their home country. The fear of retaliation, isolation, or stigmatization by family and community members is too often a reality that victims face. In addition, they may lack knowledge of legal and social systems and often are not able to access services due to limited English proficiency (LEP).

Abusers often manipulate their partner's undocumented status as a form of intimate partner violence and coercive control by:

1. Refusing to file immigration papers on the abused partner's behalf;
2. Threatening to withdraw the abused partner's immigration case;
3. Withholding financial resources unless the undocumented partner continues to work with false documents, and
4. Threatening to call the Department of Homeland Security to have the undocumented partner deported.

Immigrant survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, or other violent crimes may be eligible to apply for several immigration benefits which may ultimately allow them to seek United States citizenship. They may be eligible for special waivers to access immigration protections. Immigrant survivors in Florida with certain immigration protections can obtain driver's licenses, work permit, lawful permanent residence, and public benefits.

Effective legal representation in the court can help a survivor become free of an abuser. It can also result in divorce, custody, and permanent, meaningful child support for minor children.

Accomplishments

Coordinated Entry and Access: The DVOB identified the need to improve how victims learn of and access services. In specific, shelter. The DVOB's Gaps and Needs Workgroup (the Workgroup) learned that victims were provided with multiple numbers to call when seeking shelter. At times, a victim in crisis and seeking safety, would have to call the various shelters, only to find that no beds were available. The Workgroup recommended the establishment of a single hotline for victims to call when seeking lifesaving shelter placement and services.

We appreciate Ms. Ivon Mesa, Chief of the Community Action and Human Services Department (CAHSD), Victims Targeted Services Division, who was a member of the Workgroup, for her participation and contribution. Ms. Mesa identified the one local hotline telephone number for victims to call (305 -285- 5900) when seeking shelter and advocacy services. That call taker will know the bed inventory for the day, navigate the steps and make the calls necessary to achieve placement, if a bed is available. CAHSD has also created a placement team to support triaging cases, if needed, to achieve a successful response to the callers' needs.

Furthermore, Lotus House Shelter for Women and Children (Lotus House) and CAHSD have established a process to identify domestic violence cases that would be better served, and more appropriately placed in their respective shelters, either because the safety situation has been resolved and the victim no longer requires placement in an undisclosed location/shelter or vice versa. These two changes in service approach, policy and process are critical first steps towards strengthening our coordinated entry/ no wrong door approach to services that victims need and deserve. We thank Constance Collins, President and CEO of Lotus House, and Ms. Ivon Mesa for achieving this important collaboration that can only improve the operations of the both the domestic violence and homeless continuums of care.

COVID-19 High Risk Populations Workgroup: The Board appreciates the commitment and leadership of our Vice Chair, Carrie Soubal, for guiding and leading the work of the COVID-19 High Risk Populations Workgroup (the Workgroup) In June 2020, the DVOB created the Workgroup to identify, augment and if needed, create a more aggressive and proactive approach to our community wide response to high-risk victims and their children during times of COVID-19.

The Workgroup coordinated with Ms. Mesa and the Miami-Dade County's Coordinated Victims Assistance Center (CVAC) team. Members interviewed other entities and experts directly serving victims countywide seeking their ideas and recommendations based on their professional experiences and expertise. We thank everyone for their contributions and are grateful for the knowledge shared and recommendations offered.

The Workgroup conducted a series of meetings through October 2020, seeking information from experts and front-line providers, victim advocates, court system representatives, school system representatives, Guardian ad Litem, and the Department of Children and Families. The DVOB agreed to add two of the recommendations of the Workgroup as a supplement to the 2020 Annual Report [Supplemental Recommendations 2020 Annual Report](#) and are carried over to this Report. The Workgroup stands ready to resume its work should the DVOB determine the need to do so.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Study: In 2019, the BCC approved the DVOB's recommendation to conduct a countywide Intimate Partner Study. The DVOB is grateful for the support of Ms. Namita Uppal and her team at Miami-Dade County Internal Services Department, Procurement Division, who drafted an Interlocal Agreement (the Agreement) between Miami Dade County and the University of Central Florida's Institute of Behavioral and Social Sciences to conduct the IPV Study. UCF provided a detailed response to the scope of work for the IPV Study developed by the DVOB.

We are deeply grateful for the Mayor and Budget Director, David Clodfelter for identifying the funding to support this study. We appreciate Mr. Carlos Maxwell and Ms. Amy Horton-Tavera with the Office of Management and Budget for stepping up to assist with the administrative and monitoring functions required in the Interlocal Agreement. The DVOB looks forward to learning from this Study and including updates of the Study in our next report.

Second Center Completion - In 2010, the DVOB identified and selected property in the Southwest section of Miami-Dade County (address is confidential per Florida Law) for construction of the second 60-bed state-of-the-art Silver LEED Certified center (the Center) to be constructed with funding from the Domestic Violence portion of the Food & Beverage Tax proceeds.

In 2014, the DVOB engaged the services of Miami-Dade County's Internal Services Department (ISD) to manage the design and construction of this new center. Permitting was completed and Notice of Commencement for construction was issued in November 2019. The total budget for the construction of this center was \$16.246 million.

The DVOB is grateful to Commissioner Rebeca Sosa for sponsoring and the BCC for adopting its recommendation to pass legislation expediting the construction of the new shelter. The Board unanimously adopted Resolution # R212-19 on February 20, 2019.

We are happy to report that a Certificate of Occupancy was issued in November 2021 when the construction of the Center was completed. The shelter opened its doors and welcomed participants during the last week in November 2021. The DVOB is indebted to the ISD team of extraordinary and dedicated project managers, architects, and engineers that brought this dream to reality.

The Community Action and Human Services Department administers both centers constructed with the funds from the Domestic Violence portion of the F&B Tax. The operations cost for the first shelter is \$1.9 Million and the second **shelter is \$2.5 Million**. Appendix A are the shelter services provided by CAHSD for the respective fiscal year.

Community Education and Outreach Committee: It is imperative we continue to engage our diverse community and raise awareness on domestic violence and the resources in place for victims, survivors, and batterers and how to access such resources. Of importance is addressing the needs and circumstances of victims at a higher risk of violence. The elderly, children, people with disabilities, LGBTQ individuals, migrants, refugees, the undocumented, and their pets, to name a few. The DVOB, at its March 2021 meeting, approved the activation of its Community Education and Collaboration Committee to identify the scope of the work of this committee and create a communication plan accordingly. The Committee's work will be included in the DVOB's next annual report.

University of Miami Human Rights Clinic (UMHRC): The DVOB works closely with UMHRC to address law enforcement's response to domestic violence. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) has created two assessment instruments that are used to obtain feedback on this important subject.

There are two groups reviewing the IACP's agency self-assessment and community assessment instruments. DVOB Vice Chair, Ms. Carrie Soubal, former DVOB board member Ms. Constance Collins, and Executive Director, Ms. Regalado are part of the group reviewing the community assessment tool. The task of this group is to adapt and adopt the community survey locally for implementation. Updates on this work will be included in future reports.

Community Engagement and Representation: The DVOB, through its Executive Director, is represented in the events and agencies listed below. In addition, the Vice Chair of the DVOB attends the Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust Board Meetings.

1. Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Council;
2. Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team;
3. Commission for Women full board and domestic violence and violence against women and girls committee meetings;
4. Eleventh Judicial Circuit's Court Domestic Violence Committee and Subcommittees.
5. Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust Board, Continuum of Care and Performance Evaluation Committees, Request for Proposals /Applications (RFP/A) Selection Committee;
6. Human Trafficking Consortium, Office of the State Attorney, and
7. The Women's Fund Impact Collaborative and other workshops and events.

Expansion of the F&B Tax to Beach Municipalities: The Beach Municipalities, which includes Miami Beach, Surfside, and Bal Harbor, per Section 212.0306 of the Florida Statutes, have not participated in the F&B Tax since the inception of the Tax. Per Section 212.0306 of the Florida Statutes, the exemption was granted to avoid the burden of additional taxation, given they levied and continue to levy a Resort Tax. Notwithstanding, according to the data in the Gaps & Needs Report, [Annual Reports\Annual Report 2020 January 2022](#) , Miami Beach is the fifth highest municipality in Miami-Dade County experiencing domestic violence offenses.

During multiple occasions, the DVOB presented to the City of Miami Beach important domestic violence statistical data and other facts supporting the need for their participation in the F&B Tax. As a direct result of these data driven presentations, the Miami Beach Mayor and Commissioners approved a straw ballot measure in the City's November 2021 general election. The ballot asked Miami Beach residents if they would support a resolution to the Florida Legislature from the City of Miami Beach agreeing to participate in the F&B Tax. 53.4 % of Miami Beach voters approved the measure. At the December 7, 2021, Miami Beach Commission meeting, the Commission passed such resolution. The DVOB thanks Commissioner Ricky Ariola for his staunch support and leadership on this matter.

The DVOB deeply appreciates Commissioner Rebeca Sosa for sponsoring Resolution R-1198-21, which includes, as part of Miami-Dade County's legislative priorities, that the Florida Legislature and the Miami-Dade County Legislative Delegation work to amend and expand the local option Food and Beverage Tax to include the Beach Municipalities.. <https://www.miamidade.gov/govaction/legistarfiles/MinMatters/Y2021/212952min.pdf>.

Miami Beach Funding to DVOB: Also, as a direct result of the DVOB's presentations to Miami Beach, in October 2019, the City of Miami Beach approved Resolution # 2019-31082 providing \$125,000 for two fiscal years each to the DVOB for domestic violence services. The DVOB Executive Director and Miami Beach Police Department staff developed the scope of services to be supported by these funds. The eligible activities for this funding were designed to facilitate victims' immediate needs and gaps. This business requires BCC sponsorship for action to approve receipt of these funds. The DVOB seeks a BCC sponsor of this item.

Local

DVOB Ordinance Amendments: The DVOB is indebted to Commissioner Rebeca Sosa for her unfailing support of the work of this board and sponsorship of Ordinance No. 21-63 amending Section 2.892 of the County Code that addresses the quorum, attendance, and membership requirements of the DVOB. [DVOB Board Meetings 2021\November 17, 2021\DVOB Comm Sosa Amendment Ordinance attendance quorum and membership.pdf](#). The DVOB discussed the issue experienced with attendance, and thus attaining quorum, that impeded the work of the board in previous years.

Miami-Dade County Boards Amendments : The DVOB is grateful for Senator Garcia's proposed Ordinance amendment to Section 2.11.38 of the Code of Miami-Dade County, authorizing waiver of the restriction that prohibits individuals from serving on certain county boards from simultaneously serving on another county board [MEMORANDUM \(miamidade.gov\)](#).

This restriction resulted in the inevitable resignation a very productive and contributing member of the DVOB. We are hopeful this amendment is successful to allow for the DVOB to continue to attract and maintain productive and committed board members that have significant impact on the Board's achievements.

Recommendations- Legislative Advocacy

**** 1. Federal: Elimination of Cap on U Visas- Background:** As a result of the DVOB's COVID-19 High Risk Populations Workgroup findings, the DVOB agreed it is necessary for the United States Congress to eliminate the cap on U Visas that can be issued each year.

Congress created the U nonimmigrant visa with the passage of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (including the Battered Immigrant Women's Protection Act) in October 2000. The U nonimmigrant status (U visa) is set aside for victims of certain crimes who have suffered mental or physical abuse and are helpful to law enforcement or government officials in the investigation or prosecution of criminal activity. The legislation is intended to strengthen the ability of law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute cases of domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking of noncitizens and other crimes, while also protecting victims of crimes. The legislation also helps law enforcement agencies to better serve these victims.

Federal law limits U visas to 10,000 annually, which has resulted in a backlog of visas in the hundreds of thousands and causing a five-to-six-year backlog for processing. This cap forces victims to remain in legal limbo regarding their legal status in the United States. **Recommendation # 1: Urge U.S. Congress to Eliminate Cap on U Visas-** The DVOB recommends that the Board of County Commissioners adopt legislation urging the United States Congress to pass legislation eliminating the cap on the number of U visas that can be issued each year.

**** 2. State: U Visas- Lack of Uniform Statewide Certification Process-Background:** The law enforcement certification USCIS Form I-918, Supplement B, U Nonimmigrant Status Certification (Form I-918B) is a required element for U visa applications. The certification "is a required piece of evidence to confirm that a qualifying crime has occurred and that the victim was helpful, is being helpful, or is likely to be helpful in the detection, investigation, or prosecution of criminal activity," according to the U Visa Law Enforcement Certification Resource Guide.

Although the law enforcement certification is required for a victim to be eligible for a U visa, law enforcement agencies have discretion whether to provide the certification or not. Further, in Florida, there is no uniform state system for the certification of U Visas requests.

Therefore, certification requests in some counties are processed quickly, while requests in other counties sit idle, preventing a victim's certification process to commence. **Recommendation # 2: Urge the Florida Legislature to create a uniform system for the certification of U-Visas:** The DVOB recommends that the State establish, as the law permits, a uniform state system for processing law enforcement U visa certification requests using Form I-918B U, or its successor.

**** 3. State: Expansion of the F&B Tax to Beach Municipalities-Background:** Per Section 212.0306 of the Florida Statutes, the Beach Municipalities, consisting of Miami Beach, Surfside, and Bal Harbor, were exempt from participating in the F&B Tax. This exemption was granted to avoid the burden of additional taxation, given these municipalities levied and continue to levy a Resort Tax.

In November 2021, Miami Beach voters approved a non-binding ballot measure supporting that Miami Beach submit a resolution to the State to amend Section 212.0306 of the Florida Statutes to expand and include the Beach Municipalities in the participation of the F&B Tax. **Recommendation # 3: Expand the F&B Tax to the Beach Municipalities.** The DVOB urges the BCC to continue to include in Miami-Dade County's legislative priorities that the Florida Legislature and the Miami-Dade County Legislative Delegation work to amend and expand the local option Food and Beverage Tax to include the Beach Municipalities.

**** 4. State: Florida Crisis Shelter Protection Act- Background:** During the 19-20 Legislative Session, the Florida Crisis Protection Act (House Bill 1397; Senate Bill 1754) failed to pass. The Bill would exempt domestic violence centers, youth shelters, homeless and hurricane evacuation shelter operators from third party litigation. Operations of these shelters and particularly the liability insurance costs have become prohibitive and will render shelters uninsurable. **Recommendation # 4: Urge the Florida Legislature to pass the Florida Crisis Shelter Protection Act.**

The DVOB urges the BCC to include this Act in the upcoming Miami-Dade County's legislative priorities. The Bill would exempt domestic violence centers, youth shelters, homeless and hurricane evacuation shelter operators from third party litigation. Operations of these shelters, particularly the cost of liability insurance has become prohibitive and will render shelters uninsurable.

**** 5. Local: Miami Beach Funding to DVOB- Background:** In October 2019, the City of Miami Beach approved Resolution # 2019-31082 providing \$125,000 for two fiscal years each to the DVOB for domestic violence services. **Recommendation # 5:** The DVOB seeks a BCC sponsor for this item and urges the BCC to approve receipt of this urgently needed funding for victims of Domestic Violence.

**** 6. Domestic Violence Oversight Board Trust Fund- Background:** The DVOB at its March 2021 Board meeting approved the activation of its Community Education and Collaboration Committee to identify the scope of the work of this committee and create a communication plan accordingly. The intent is to educate the community, stakeholders, policy makers, and victims on the issues of Domestic Violence, the resources in place for victims and their and dependent children. The DVOB Trust Fund will support the efforts of the Committee's work and activities. **Recommendation # 6:** The DVOB seeks BCC sponsorship and approval of the DVOB Trust Fund for the purpose of supporting the activities of the Community Education and Outreach Committee to raise awareness of Domestic Violence and resources in our community.

***7. Salary and Benefits Parity for Victim Advocates- Background:** In late December 2021, the DVOB received an inquiry from a member of the public regarding the absence of advocacy services at one of the domestic violence intake units. The DVOB discussed this inquiry with its partners, the 11th Judicial Circuit Court, Domestic Violence Division, Community Action and Human Services Department (CAHSD), Miami-Dade County State Attorney's Office (SAO), Survivors' Pathway Corporation, Miami-Dade County Police Department, Special Victims Bureau, and Miami Beach Police Department, Criminal Investigation Division.

Findings: Resignations, Vacancies, Salaries and Low Response to Job Postings CAHSD has a total of 107 staff members in the Violence Prevention and Intervention Targeted Services Bureau. Of these, 65 positions are (varying levels of) victim advocates providing advocacy services countywide. The positions are funded by a mix of county general revenue funds, State, Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) and Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) grants.

Of the 65, there are a total of 21 vacancies. Since the pandemic, most of these victim advocates resigned for higher paying and less stressful jobs in the corporate sector, such as Amazon, with an annual starting salary of \$60,000 with benefits. The annual starting salary for a victim advocate at CAHSD is \$ 38,997.66. There has been a noticeable shortage of applicants for these positions, causing a delay in filling them.

Miami-Dade County Police Department has a total of 23 victim advocates throughout the various districts within the department, of these 23 positions, 6 are in the SVB and one Victim Advocate Manager for the entire department. Fourteen positions are funded through Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grants and the remainder are funded by the Office of Victims of Crime (OVC) grant.

The remaining positions are funded with MDC general revenue funds. The annual starting salary for these positions is \$46,779.46. While MDPD's victim advocate salaries are slightly higher than CAHSD's victim advocates, all MDPD Victim Advocates are paid overtime after hours, while on call, during weekdays, weekends, and holidays. They also are assigned a take home vehicle. These victim advocates are on call and advocacy services are not limited to providing court advocacy.

Survivors' Pathway Corporation has a total of 8 victim advocates at an annual starting salary of \$60,000 plus benefits. The agency has and is currently providing court victim advocacy services virtually in addition to advocacy services to the organization's clients.

Miami Beach Police Department has a total of 6 victim advocates at a starting annual salary of \$72,800, plus benefits. One position is 100% funded by the City's general revenue and five are 75% funded through VOCA, and 25% by general revenue funds. They provide court advocacy to victims in and outside their jurisdiction as needed.

Office of the State Attorney has a total of 68 victim advocates/victim witness counselors. The annual starting salary for these positions is \$27,040 plus benefits. The role and job function of the victim witness counselor is to facilitate the victim's involvement. The team, comprised of an assistant state attorney, victim witness counselor and trial coordinator keep victims advised as the case progresses. They address the felony and misdemeanor domestic violence crimes and provide court advocacy services to victims whose cases they represent.

Immediate Solutions: Survivors' Pathway immediately resumed its support to victims by assigning its victim advocates to the DV Intake units, as needed, and continues to do so. CAHSD is working with Miami Dade County Human Resources Department to explore the salary issue by way of reclassifying the positions with the aim of increasing the salary range. As of January 2022, CAHSD has onboarded two new victim advocates. The additional three victim advocates to serve at the DV Intake Units have been hired as of this month. These advocates must now complete the required core competency training for victim advocates to receive privilege status and will soon fill the void at the Domestic Violence Court Intake Units.

***Recommendation # 7: Funding for salary parity:** It is the agreement and consensus that the current need for victim advocacy services is attributed to resources and funding. Salary levels and disparity between agencies in pay ranges must be addressed, further explored, and resolved. In discussions with most, a starting annual salary of no less than \$60,000 with benefits seems to be a reasonable start.

Staffing at the DV Intake Units- There was agreement and consensus that a minimum of one victim advocate should be assigned to each of the DV Intake Units. The DV Intake Units are the perfect venue and time to begin engaging victims and providing them with access to the array of services within the continuum of care. Victims spend on average two hours conducting business at the DV Intake Units.

During this time, advocates can conduct assessments, safety planning and develop a care plan with the victim, connecting them to valuable services that include housing, counseling, and all other core services that victims need.

***8. Pro Bono Immigration Services for Survivors: Background:** While there are various resources of pro bono services designed to assist survivors of domestic violence in Miami-Dade County, there is a higher demand than capacity. Survivors are often forced to go without this critical service within our coordinated community response to IPV. Often, there is a three to four month waiting list and, in some cases, the reduced fees for the required filing are not affordable to survivors. **Recommendation # 8:** The DVOB recommends Miami-Dade County allocate funding in the upcoming FY Budget for Pro Bono immigration services for survivors of IPV in the amount of \$2.5M to serve at least 1000 survivors through direct legal representation and monthly outreach educational individual and group sessions. These outreach educational sessions would be offered throughout organizations serving DV survivors who do not yet have lawful status, or need to adjust status, connecting them to direct legal representation.

Summary Closing & Next Steps

The DVOB will continue to strengthen the collaboration between the various system components that provide domestic violence services to better serve victims and hold batterers accountable. Our goal is to establish a process whereby a comprehensive database of domestic violence service providers uniformly collects, share, and report key data necessary to analyze and provide regular reporting on program and system outcomes in our community. The DVOB is committed to using this data to educate leaders and the community on the status of the public health crisis that is domestic violence. The DVOB has also identified the importance of a strong working relationship and communications with the State of Florida Department of Children and Families as the funder of all certified domestic violence centers in our state.

We equally look forward to launching, and where appropriate, building upon existing public education and awareness campaigns in our schools, and throughout the community on domestic violence that speak to the diverse make up of our community.

Finally, the DVOB has taken a firm stance that until there is sufficient capacity to meet the needs of victims in our county seeking safe shelter, the original intent of the DV portion of the F&B Tax for the construction and operations of domestic violence shelters and their operations be the one and only use of these funds.

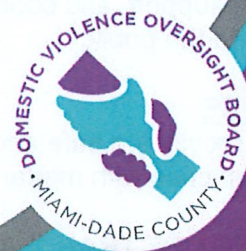
Appendix A- DV Services

January 2020-January 2021
Services Delivered by Community Action and Human Services Department
Violence Prevention and Intervention Division

Participants Served with Residential Services	Total
Number of Children/ Youth	240
Adults:	
Number of Women	219
Number of Men	7
Total:	466
Number of clients accessing Coordinated Services (CVAC)	Total
Number of Children/Youth	84
Adults:	
Number of Women	1834
Number of Men	168
Total:	2086
Shelter Nights	28,334
Crisis/ Hotline Calls	2,377
Unmet Requests for Shelter	16
Services to Victims	
Number of adult victims receiving criminal/civil advocacy	900
Number of adult victims receiving crisis intervention	1,770
Number of adult victims receiving victim advocacy services	1,357
Number of children receiving crisis intervention	299
Number of children/youth receiving victim advocacy services	267
Total:	4,593
Dollar amount of assistance through Direct Relief	1,865,487
Number of victims received Direct Relief assistance	901
Number of referrals made through Violence Prevention and Intervention Services	8,957

Food and Beverage Growth Rate											0.00%	1.00%
UPDATED PROJECTIONS FROM OMIS 6.23.21											HT	HT
											HT	HT
Actual Food and Beverage Collection	25,283,751	27,962,644	29,571,693.75	20,908,955	29,337,952	24,169,871.11	23,887,000.00	HT				
Estimated Food and Beverage Collection					29,339,000	31,209,915	28,102,450					
Operations and construction of Domestic Violence Shelters	3,792,563	4,194,397	4,435,754	3,136,343	4,400,850	4,627,721	4,215,450					
Data Break												
			1,299,411	29.29%		1,491,378	47.55%					
	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2020-21	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23		
	Actual	Actuals	Actuals	Actuals	Actual	Adopted	Adopted	Actual	Projection	Proposed Budget		
Beginning Fund Balance (ST 150 156)	16,438,305	17,770,869	19,010,500	20,990,213	23,681,810	12,729,000	17,764,513	14,699,476		14,842,100		
Revenues												
F&B Tax Revenue (15%)	3,688,718	3,792,563	4,194,396	4,435,754	3,136,343	4,401,000	4,627,721	4,215,450		4,215,450		
Interest Income	31,510	79,557	253,437	428,789	251,916	312,000	22,152	23,038		23,960		
Fiscal Year Collection	3,720,228	3,872,120	4,447,833	4,864,543	3,388,259	4,713,000	4,649,873.3	4,238,488		4,239,410		
Total Revenues (Carryover and Collections)	20,158,533	21,642,989	23,458,333	25,854,756	27,070,069	17,442,000	22,414,386	18,937,985	23,176,453	19,081,510		
									23,320,920			
	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2020-21	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23		
	Actual	Actuals	Actuals	Actuals	Actual	Adopted	Adopted	Actual	Projection	Proposed Budget		
Expenditures												
Personnel Costs	144,283	102,858	105,273	99,634	107,000	114,000	104,000	119,045		126,000		
Operating Costs Shelter 1 (Safe Space)	1,875,237	2,022,391	1,986,235	1,869,088	1,522,568	1,974,000	1,946,339	1,903,663		2,120,676		
Other Operating Expenses	-254,123	30,672	30,469	13,928	20,095	67,000	1,440	3,000		3,000		
Roof & 40 Year Recertification	0	0	0	0	49,000	0	0	0		0		
Capital/Development Costs for 2nd Shelter	622,267	476,568	346,143	190,296	7,606,893	3,913,000	5,430,131	0		0		
Interdepartmental Transfer							233,000					
Operating Costs Empowerment Center	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,068,156		2,328,305		
Capital- Renovations Safe Space	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		385,000		
Operating Costs for 3rd Shelter	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		0		
Reserves												
	0	0	0	0	0	11,374,000	0	0		14,118,529		
						0	0	0				

OFFICE OF COMMUNITY
ADVOCACY
 BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS



To: Miguel De Grandy, Chair, and Members
 Domestic Violence Oversight Board

Date: March 16, 2022

From: Elizabeth Regalado, Executive Director, DVOB

Subject: Court Advocacy Services

This report is in response to the Chair's request at our January 26, 2022, board meeting on the issues and possible solutions surrounding court advocacy services in the Domestic Violence Intake Units.

BACKGROUND

In late December 2021, we received an inquiry from a member of the public regarding the absence of advocacy services at one of the domestic violence intake units. This summarizes the information gathered from discussion with our partners, the 11th Judicial Circuit Court, Domestic Violence Division, Community Action and Human Services Department (CAHSD), Miami-Dade County State Attorney's Office, Survivors' Pathway Corporation, Miami-Dade County Police Department, Special Victims Bureau, and Miami Beach Police Department, Criminal Investigation Division.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COURT SERVICES

The Eleventh Judicial Circuit of Florida created a specialized Domestic Violence Division, comprised of seven judges and support services to deal exclusively with family violence issues and effectively addressing this type of crime through the justice system. The Domestic Violence Division hears protection (restraining) order cases, violation of injunction cases, criminal misdemeanor cases involving family violence and risk protection order cases. The court mandates accountability, punishment, and meaningful treatment. Case managers assist the judges with preparation of injunction orders, time-sharing schedules and child support when the parties have minor children in common, specialized court orders and case management. The Division Judges and support personnel are located at the Lawson E. Thomas Courthouse Center; however, some injunction cases are filed at three Branch Court locations. Seven judges in the Branch Court locations hear these cases in addition to their assignments in other divisions. Below is a summary of the other services provided within the Domestic Violence Division of the 11th Judicial Circuit.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CIVIL CASE MANAGEMENT UNIT

The Domestic Violence Case Management Unit provides immediate assistance, referrals, case assessment, support, and coordination. The unit serves as a liaison between the judiciary, related agencies, and the public.

COURT CARE

Court Care provides a safe and supervised drop-in childcare facility for children who must be in court in connection with matters involving the children or their parents or guardians.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION

Court Interpreters interpret and translate verbal and written communications from a non-English to English language in court proceedings.

Pro Bono Legal Services- A Joint Pro Bono Project of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit, Dade Legal Aid, and the Dade County Bar Association

DVOB discussion included exploring the recruitment of Miami-Dade County's major private law firms to provide pro bono work as a solution to the court advocacy services. This type of court representation is not the gap being experienced when referring to court advocacy services. The gap in court advocacy services is previously described under Victim Advocacy Services section of this communication and not legal representation. The Put Something Back Pro Bono Project is the official program for providing pro bono, click [here](#) or free legal assistance to the needy population of Miami-Dade County. It is designed to increase access to the civil legal system by serving as an umbrella agency for referral to all other legal service providers and as a clearinghouse for attorneys who volunteer to help the indigent of the community. Through this project, clients are referred to volunteer attorneys experienced in a wide range of legal matters, including: family cases; children's matters requiring Guardians Ad Litem in family, juvenile dependency, domestic violence, probate and civil court; consumer and housing concerns; domestic violence permanent injunction matters; general Civil issues; social security and veterans benefits; employment matters; the preparation and processing of Wills; and, non-fee generating civil court cases. Since 1992, the program has handled thousands of cases and recruited thousands of attorneys, including private, corporate, and public law firms who have signed up to assist. It is the largest and most comprehensive pro bono project in Florida.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTAKE UNITS

Operated through the joint efforts of the Clerk of Courts (COC), and CAHSD, the Intake Unit is comprised of victim advocates from CAHSD and Survivors' Pathway Corporation. Intake counselors and support staff also provide efficient and responsive services to the court and the community. Countywide, there are five Domestic Violence Intake /Outreach Units within the 11th Judicial Court 's Domestic Violence Division. Listed below are their locations.

- [Hialeah District Court](#)
- [Joseph Caleb Center Court](#)
- [Lawson E. Thomas Courthouse Center](#)
- [North Dade Justice Center](#)
- [South Dade Justice Center](#)

CAHSD's Coordinated Victims Assistance Center, (CVAC) is our community's (and only such center in the state) one stop family justice center. Through its partners, CAHSD provides over 38 services to survivors of IPV, Sexual Assault (SA) and Human Trafficking (HT). CVAC also serves as an additional domestic violence civil intake unit, with 5 designated attorneys assisting victims in filing for and representation with requests for orders for protection or Injunctions for Protection (IFP).

PRE AND POST COVID 19 SERVICES AND MODIFICATIONS

Pre pandemic, victim advocates from CAHSD and Survivors' Pathway Corporation were located at the DV Intake Units on a regular basis, during regular work hours. The courts, and as such, the DV Intake units, do not operate on a 24 hours /7 days per week basis. In response to the pandemic, placement of victim advocates at the DV Intake Units were modified and advocacy services assisted individuals with virtual meetings and hearings taking place during stay-at-home orders and beyond. Currently, the court is operating a hybrid model of virtual (through Zoom) and in person (at the courthouses) hearings. There is a dedicated section on their website <https://www.jud11.flcourts.org/> providing COVID 19 updates to the community.

During the early onset of COVID 19, Miami-Dade County, in collaboration with CAHSD, the Miami-Dade County State Attorney's Office, and The Womens Fund, launched a campaign to ensure victims and the community at large were informed about the service modifications and more importantly, deliver a clear and resounding message that victims were not alone, and services were available. The campaign also included new ways (Quick Response Code) to facilitate victims' access to services.

VICTIM ADVOCACY SERVICES

Victim advocacy services are the lifeline of interventions helping victims of IPV, and often end the violence in their lives. Victim advocates are found in community-based organizations and in the criminal justice system. Certified victim advocates are protected by privilege and their work with and on behalf of victims is confidential and protected by statute from compelled disclosure. Victim advocacy is trauma informed and victim centered. It is based on learning, knowing, and acknowledging the victim's lived experiences. A victim advocate is mindful of the victim's individuality and safety concerns. Victim advocates help victims understand their role as they navigate thorough and negotiate with complex systems that include housing, physical and mental health needs, financial resources, and child matters. Advocates help make legal options more accessible for victims. Advocates support the victim with conflicting feelings about their abusive relationship. Advocates at times have lived experiences of abusive relationships and know how important it is for victims to be heard and understood. Finally, advocacy services include self-help groups that offer important support to victims in ending abuse in their relationships.

FINDINGS, SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In speaking with Judge Carroll Kelly, Ms. Mesa, (CASHD) Mr. Duberli, (Survivors' Pathway Corporation), DVOB board member, Major Thomas Buchanan, Ms. Barbie Brewer, (MDPD SVB), board member Cecile Houry, Miami Beach PD, and our Vice Chair, Carrie Soubal with the Miami-Dade County Office of the State Attorney (SAO) about the issue of court advocacy services, we learned the following information.

RESIGNATIONS, VACANCIES, SALARIES & LOW RESPONSE TO JOB OPENINGS

CAHSD has a total of 107 staff members in the Violence Prevention and Intervention Targeted Services Bureau. Of these, 65 positions are (varying levels of) victim advocates providing advocacy services countywide. The positions are funded by a mix of county general revenue funds, State, Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) and Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) grants.

Of the 65, there are a total of 21 vacancies. Since the pandemic, most of these victim advocates resigned for higher paying and less stressful jobs in the corporate sector, such as Amazon, with an annual starting salary of \$60,000 with benefits. The annual starting salary for a victim advocate at CAHSD is \$ 38,997.66. There has been a noticeable shortage of applicants for these positions, causing a delay in filling them.

Miami-Dade County Police Department has a total of 23 victim advocates throughout the various districts within the department, of these 23 positions, 6 are in the SVB and one Victim Advocate Manager for the entire department. Fourteen positions are funded through Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grants and the remainder are funded by the Office of Victims of Crime (OVC) grant. The remaining positions are funded with MDC general revenue funds. The annual starting salary for these positions is \$46,779.46. While MDPD's victim advocate salaries are slightly higher than CAHSD's victim advocates, all MDPD Victim Advocates are paid overtime after hours, while on call, during weekdays, weekends, and holidays. They also receive an assigned /take home vehicle. These victim advocates are on call and advocacy services are not limited to providing court advocacy.

Survivors' Pathway Corporation has a total of 8 victim advocates at an annual starting salary of \$60,000 plus benefits. The agency has and is currently providing court victim advocacy services virtually in addition to advocacy services to the organization's clients.

Miami Beach PD has a total of 6 victim advocates at a starting annual salary of \$72,800, plus benefits. One position is 100% funded by the City's general revenue and five are 75% funded through VOCA, and 25% by general revenue funds. They provide court advocacy to victims in and outside their jurisdiction as needed.

The SAO has a total of 68 victim advocates/victim witness counselors. The annual starting salary for these positions is \$27,040 plus benefits. The role and job function of the victim witness counselor is to facilitate the victim's involvement. The team, comprised of an assistant state attorney, victim witness counselor and trial coordinator keep victims advised as the case progresses. They address the felony and misdemeanor domestic violence crimes and provide court advocacy services to victims whose cases they represent.

During this year's legislative session, the Legislature approved setting a minimum wage of \$15.00 an hour, plus benefits, for state employees. Accordingly, the new starting salary will be \$31,200.00. The Legislature also approved a 5.38% raise for current state employees. The fiscal impact of this raise will vary according to the employees' current salaries.

IMMEDIATE SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

IMMEDIATE SOLUTIONS

Survivors' Pathway immediately resumed its support to victims by assigning its victim advocates to the DV Intake units, as needed, and continues to do so, to date. CAHSD is working with MDC Human Resources Department to explore the salary issue by way of reclassifying the positions with the aim of increasing the salary range. As of January 2022, CAHSD has onboarded two new victim advocates. The additional three victim advocates to serve at the DV Intake Units have been hired as of this month. These advocates must now complete the required core competency training for victim advocates to receive privilege status and will soon fill the void at the DV Intake Units. **Attachment 1** is CAHSD's calendar of victim advocate coverage at the intake units as of late February 2022.

RECOMMENDATIONS

More funding for salaries and parity - It is the agreement and consensus that the current need for advocacy services is attributed to resources and funding. Salary levels and disparity between agencies in pay ranges must be addressed, further explored, and resolved. In discussions with most, a starting annual salary of no less than \$60,000 with benefits seems to be a reasonable start.

Staffing at the DV Intake Units- The group agreed that a minimum of one victim advocate should be assigned to each of the DV Intake Units. The group further agrees the DV Intake Units are the perfect venue and time to begin engaging victims and providing them with access to the array of services withing the continuum of care. Victims spend on average two hours conducting business at the DV Intake Units. During this time, advocates can conduct assessments, safety planning and develop a care plan with the victim, connecting them to housing, counseling, and all other key services that victims need.

In closing, I want to express my appreciation for the education I received from everyone I reached out to and spoke with regarding this matter. Collectively, you provided valuable information and recommendations in our efforts to improve services to victims of IPV/Domestic Violence.

RESOLUTION NO. 2022-1

RESOLUTION OF THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OVERSIGHT
BOARD URGING THE MIAMI-DADE BOARD OF COUNTY
COMMISSIONERS AND THE COUNTY MAYOR TO
ADDRESS THE SHORTAGE OF VICTIM ADVOCATES BY
BRINGING THE SALARIES FOR VICTIM ADVOCATES
EMPLOYED BY THE COUNTY INTO PARITY WITH THE
SALARIES PAID BY OTHER AGENCIES

WHEREAS, in response to public comments about the lack of domestic violence victim advocates in the local courts, the Executive Director of the DVOB issued a report on Court Advocacy Services dated March 16, 2022 (report), attached as Attachment 1; and

WHEREAS, the report explains that the Eleventh Judicial Circuit of Florida (court) operates five Domestic Violence Intake Units staffed in part by victim advocates from the Miami-Dade County Community Action and Human Services Department (CAHSD); and

WHEREAS, the victim advocates in the Intake Units assist victims seeking injunctions for protection against abuse and make referrals to support services in the community; and

WHEREAS, additionally, CAHSD employs other victim advocates who provide advocacy services countywide; and

WHEREAS, unfortunately, CAHSD has encountered problems recruiting and retaining victim advocates; and

WHEREAS, at the time the report was issued, CAHSD had 65 victim advocate positions budgeted, but 21 of those positions were vacant; and

WHEREAS, according to the report, many of CAHSD's victim advocates "resigned for higher paying and less stressful jobs in the corporate sector, such as Amazon, with an annual starting salary of \$60,000.00 with benefits"; and

WHEREAS, according to the report, the annual starting salary for a victim advocate employed by CAHSD is \$38,977.66, and “[t]here has been a noticeable shortage of applicants for these positions, causing a delay in filling them”; and

WHEREAS, the inability to retain victim advocates means that the training and resources invested into those advocates and the knowledge and wisdom gained by those advocates is lost, requiring that the County invest additional resources and time into the training of new advocates; and

WHEREAS, even more troubling, the inability to hire and retain victim advocates causes victims to go without the advocacy services they desperately need; and

WHEREAS, according to the report, other local agencies pay higher salaries for victim advocates, with salaries ranging from \$60,000.00 to \$72,800.00, plus benefits; and

WHEREAS, the report recommends that the County increase victim advocate salaries to at least \$60,000.00 with benefits; and

WHEREAS, the DVOB is concerned about CAHSD’s shortage of victim advocates in the court and countywide; and

WHEREAS, one of the duties of the DVOB is to advise the Miami-Dade County Board of County Commissioners as to all matters relating to domestic violence; and

WHEREAS, the DVOB desires to urge the Miami-Dade County Board of County Commissioners and the County Mayor to raise victim advocate salaries to be in parity with the salaries paid by other local agencies,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OVERSIGHT BOARD, that the DVOB:

Section 1. Approves and incorporates the foregoing recitals into this resolution.

Section 2. Urges the Miami-Dade County Board of County Commissioners and the County Mayor to address the shortage of victim advocates by raising victim advocate salaries to be in parity with the salaries paid by other local agencies.

Section 3. This Board directs the DVOB Executive Director to transmit a copy of this resolution to the Miami-Dade County Board of County Commissioners, the County Mayor and the Clerk of the Board.

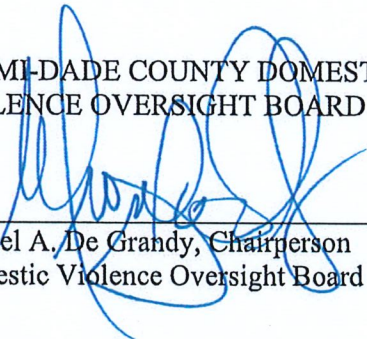
It was offered by Vanessa Joseph, who moved its adoption. The motion was seconded by Cecile Houry, and upon being put to a vote, the vote was as follows:

Miguel A. De Grandy, Chairperson	aye
Carrie Q. Soubal, Vice-Chairperson	aye
Ronald L. Book	absent
Cecile Houry	aye
Rosa Kasse	nay
Marlen A. Oria	aye
Maria Santamaria	absent
Thomas B. Buchananaye	aye
Vanessa Joseph	aye
Shirlyon McWhorter	absent
Migna Sanchez-Llorens	absent

The Chairperson thereupon declared the resolution duly passed and adopted this 25th day of May, 2022.

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE OVERSIGHT BOARD

By:



Miguel A. De Grandy, Chairperson
Domestic Violence Oversight Board

Approved as to form
and legal sufficiency:

Brenda Kuhns Neuman
Assistant County Attorney

BKN
