



**Office for the
Prevention of
Domestic Violence**

KATHY HOCHUL
Governor

KELLI OWENS
Executive Director

**NYS Joint Senate Committee Public Hearing – Human Services Programs for
Domestic Violence Survivors**

*NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence
October 3, 2023*

Thank you, Senator Persaud, Senator Webb, and the Senate Committees on Social Services and Women’s Issues for holding this hearing and inviting me to speak on this very pressing issue. My name is Kelli Owens, and I am the Executive Director of the New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV). OPDV was established in 1992 and is the only executive-level state agency dedicated to the issue of domestic violence in the country. The existence of our office is a testament to the values New York holds.

I want to begin by thanking you all, not just for holding this hearing, but for taking time to discuss gender-based violence specifically. While OPDV’s statutory mission directs the agency to prevent and respond to domestic violence and promoting interagency and external coordination related to domestic violence, in recent years we have seen that we cannot address domestic violence without also talking about all forms of gender-based violence, including sexual assault, stalking and trafficking. OPDV now administers \$4.5 million of funding to Enough is Enough programs on college campuses throughout the State to prevent and respond to campus sexual assault, and this programming has only validated the need to expand the lens in which we view our work.

OPDV has adopted three pillars to guide the service delivery system – our work and the work of the stakeholders who interact with survivors of gender-based violence must be: (1) survivor-centered; (2) trauma-informed; and (3) culturally responsive. We believe these pillars reflect how to best meet the needs of survivors. Thirty years ago, when New York and other states were building these systems, we focused on an emergency response with a criminal justice lens. At the time those of us doing this work wanted society to acknowledge the problem and to take it seriously. We built a system where those impacted by these issues were told what to do and what was best for them. Now, we are committed to empowering survivors to be the driving force in their lives. At the federal level, the White House has recently released a *National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*, identifying several guiding principles that are in line with OPDV’s pillars.¹

While we appreciate the White House for driving this conversation nationally, more work must be done at the federal level to address the looming reduction in Victims of Crime Act funding, administered in New York by the Office of Victim Services. This will result in significant service cuts throughout the State putting providers and the victims and

¹ The White House. U.S. National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence: Strategies for Action. May 2023.



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survivors they serve at risk. It is imperative that New York State find solutions to this issue to effectively prevent gender-based violence and serve as a model for other states.

New York State has made great strides to meet the needs of survivors. During the Covid-19 pandemic, in response to the increased reports of domestic violence and difficulties of reaching survivors, OPDV expanded its existing statewide hotline to include a text and chatline to connect people with resources. In 2019, OPDV institutionalized a method for the State to hear directly from the field. We hold biannual meetings with stakeholders in each region throughout the State through our Domestic Violence Regional Councils (DVRCs), which are chaired by local entities. The DVRCs have provided the State with opportunities for engagement with the field, collaborative problem solving and public policy recommendations. OPDV's Survivor Listening Sessions also ensure the State partners are hearing directly from survivors about our systems – the most important voice in this conversation. The various State funders are in regular conversation to work collaboratively to coordinate policies and programming throughout New York.

OPDV is particularly proud of the work we have done under Governor Hochul's Executive Order 17. This has resulted in the training of almost 70,000 State employees since its issuance in April of 2022. This has made every State agency more equipped to support their employees and members of the public. The Governor has made New York a model employer in how to support those impacted by gender-based violence in the workplace.

However, while New York invests hundreds of millions of dollars of state and federal resources into its gender-based violence response, the reality is our current shelter-based model and emergency-focused response to Gender Based violence does not work for all or even most individuals. As we have learned from our Gender-Based Violence Dashboard data and the New York State Domestic Violence Fatality Review gender-based violence knows no cultural or economic boundaries; it affects people from all walks of life.² We must create a system that serves everyone.

Since 2021, OPDV has hosted 18 Survivor Listening Sessions across New York with the support of local providers and culturally specific organizations. From these sessions,

²2021 *New York State Gender-Based Violence Dashboard*. New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence. (n.d.). <https://opdv.ny.gov/2021-new-york-state-gender-based-violence-dashboard>; 2021 *NYS Domestic Violence Fatality Review: Report to the Governor and Legislature*. The New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence. [nys-domestic-violence-fatality-review_0.pdf](#)



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it is clear that survivors want to see change.³ Victims and survivors need assistance with housing, child-care, and food and financial security, without unnecessary red tape, in order to begin their healing journey.

When OPDV, through partnership with the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, was provided Pandemic Emergency Assistance Funding in 2022, programs were able to provide survivors over \$12.5 million in just 13 weeks. This money was vital in assisting survivors with much-needed expenses. OPDV is grateful for the addition in the FY24 Budget of \$5 million for financial assistance to victims and survivors of domestic violence to be administered by OPDV. Research has shown that the availability of this type of flexible funding helps achieve financial and housing stability for survivors.⁴ While this new funding stream will help ensure survivors remain safe and economically stable at a time when they need it the most, increased investments are needed in the coming years to allow for long-term system change.

None of this change is possible, though, without the dedicated front-line service providers and culturally responsive organizations that assist victims and survivors each day throughout the State. However, this workforce is facing a crisis point. According to Office and Children Family Services reporting, in 2021 nearly 40,000 New Yorkers received non-residential domestic violence services and over 10,000 were admitted to domestic violence shelters.⁵ Not-for-profits staff are often overworked and underpaid due to a lack of provider resources. This leads to frequent staff turnover and short staffing, which can result in unmet needs for survivors. We must create stronger pipelines to attract young professionals to this work and provide the agencies with the resources to keep up with the demand.

While I am happy to speak about this issue during Domestic Violence Awareness Month, it is important to remember that domestic and gender-based violence happen year-round and we must discuss them year-round. New York State is a leader in the gender-based violence field, but there are still many things that can be done to strengthen and improve our service delivery model.

³ New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence. (2022, January). Survivor Listening Sessions Preliminary Findings. <https://opdv.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2022/02/sls-report.pdf>

⁴ Sullivan, C.M., Bomsta, H., & Hacskaylo, M. (2016). Evidence that flexible funding is a promising strategy to prevent homelessness for survivors of intimate partner violence: A longitudinal pilot study. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. First published on August 12, 2016 as doi:10.1177/0886260516664318

⁵ *2021 New York State Gender-Based Violence Dashboard*. Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence. (n.d.). <https://opdv.ny.gov/2021-new-york-state-gender-based-violence-dashboard>



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Thank you again for holding this hearing and for allowing me the opportunity to speak on behalf of OPDV and the survivors of New York State. OPDV is here to serve and advise you as the Senate continues its work in the area of gender-based violence.