

WESTCHESTER COUNTY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COUNCIL 2024 REPORT



Kenneth W. Jenkins
Westchester County Executive

Robin Schlaff, Director
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Executive Summary

The Westchester County Domestic Violence Council (the “Council”), established by the Westchester County Charter, consists of 24 members appointed by the County Executive, subject to confirmation by the County Board of Legislators and includes membership from survivors, County departments, not-for-profit service providers, law enforcement, judiciary and community members.

The general purpose of the Council is to effectuate coordination between agencies, departments, the police and the courts with victims of domestic violence and abuse. The Council promotes effective prevention, intervention and treatment techniques which will be developed based upon research and data collection and to improve the response to domestic violence and abuse and to reduce incidents thereof.

Robin Schlaff, Director of the Office for Women, presides as the chairperson of the Council.

Ms. Schlaff coordinates the monthly meetings with guest speakers in disciplines that interact with domestic violence victims and their families, such as housing; legal matters; mental health; affordable child care and prenatal care; and other issues that impact domestic violence survivors and victims and their children.

With the inception of virtual meetings since COVID, the number of interested parties attending the meetings have increased, with an attendance of more than 50 individuals at each meeting.

Responsibilities

- Examine ways in which agencies, departments and the Courts of Westchester County respond to domestic violence and abuse in order to improve that response.
- Improve the cooperation and coordination among all the participants in the justice system who deal with domestic violence and abuse.
- Make recommendations to the County Executive, County Board of Legislators, agencies departments, the Courts and others regarding improving the response to domestic violence and abuse.

- Examine and review legislation that relates to domestic violence and abuse and recommend appropriate action to the County Board of Legislators' Committee on Legislation.
- Encourage and promote public education regarding domestic violence and abuse.
- Form task forces of committees to assist in planning, policy, goal and priority recommendations, and such other functions as the council deem necessary.
- Respond to related matters referred to the council by the County Executive and County Board of Legislators.
- Request of the County Executive, County department information, services, facilities and other assistance for the purpose of furthering the objectives of the council.
- Elect on an annual basis from among its members a chair, and adopt rules and regulations for the conduct of its meetings.

Ongoing Objectives

- Strengthen interagency collaboration
- Promote public awareness and education
- Review and advise on legislation
- Increase offender accountability
- Improve data collection

Key Activities & Presentations

Judy Troilo, Executive Director, The LOFT: The Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center, Inc., discussed advocacy services and hiring of an advocate to focus on intimate partner violence (“IPV”).

Tamaris Princi, Director of Abusive Partner Intervention Services, Urban Resource Institute, discussed conducting evaluations/assessments with individuals accused/convicted of family violence crimes.

Alicia Sandberg, SAAVE Program Director, Westchester Medical Center, discussed hospital based victim services and the Lethality Assessment Program (LAPline) 24/7 advocates answering phone calls from law enforcement regarding high-risk domestic violence cases.

David Ryan, Project Director, Westchester County Domestic Violence High Risk Team (“DVHRT”), presented that in 2022-2023 there were 2,913 High Risk cases. In 2023, 2,679 high risk victims connected to Westchester Medical Center for safety planning, and 992 maintained connection for follow-up services.

Guilda Tavarez, Supervisor of the Gang and Gun Unit, Westchester County Department of Probation, discussed gang cases coming in with domestic violence conditions and collaboration with SNUG, a program designed to deter gun violence in Westchester County communities.

Lisette Matos, Deputy Commissioner, Westchester County Department of Social Services (“DSS”), clarified that Mandated Reporters are obligated to call SCR when they have reasonable cause to suspect child abuse and maltreatment. DSS began the Safe & Together training, which is a DV-informed assessment and documentation training that identifies the perpetrator’s pattern of behavior and its impact on children’s safety and well-being, partner/survivor’s parenting, and disruption of family ecology/functioning.

Frederic Green, Second Deputy District Attorney, Chief of Special Prosecution, Westchester County District Attorney’s Office, discussed legislation signed into law including “Rape is Rape”.

Jimmy Meagher, LSMW, Policy Director, Government Affairs, discussed Albany budget and Federal Victims of Crime Act (“VOCA”)

funding cuts. Housing voucher model after Section 8 would have included undocumented clients but did not make it to housing plan. Legislative 5 Priority Bills reviewed:

1. Residential/Non-Residential
2. Kyra's Law- Training Judges
3. Safe Shelter ACT- expand capacity to accommodate single adults
4. Permit DV survivors to dispute coerced debt
5. Vehicle manufactures/dealers to terminate abusers access of remote technology at the request of DV survivors who shows proof of ownership and order of protection

Anti-SLAPP Legislation: Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation- can be used in defamation cases

Lindsey Song, Esq., Sanctuary for Families and Vance Long, TSG Security Corp. - September 2019 image based abuse is unlawful in NYS/NEW: includes deep-fake (as of November 2023) images are unlawful.

NYS Law: Penal Law 245:15 Unlawful Dissemination or Publication of an intimate images: Victims may sue Google, Twitter, etc. for not removing unlawful images on internet but cannot sue for money.

www.Cyberabuse.nyc

Community Education

Dr. Christopher John, Westchester County Department of Community Mental Health, discussed Project Alliance, a new initiative in the County's response to the mental health crisis, with five steps that would be implemented based on police reform activities in Westchester County:

1. 911 Diversions
2. Enhancing Behavioral Crisis Line
3. EMS-trained on mental health
4. Crisis Intervention Training ("CIT")
5. Mobile Crisis Response Team - 8 mobile crisis teams in Westchester County

Brielle Nuzzo, LMHC, Clinical Coordinator, Victims Assistance Services of WestCOP, presented on Litigation Abuse: How to identify litigation abuse and how it impacts survivors of domestic violence and coercive control theory.

Domestic Violence High Risk Team: Dave Ryan, DVHRT Project Director and Robi Schlaff, OFW Director will be working on a Community Response Team to further look into impact of litigation abuse to victims in court and repeat reports of lawyers advising victims not to report abuse during matrimonial cases because it may trigger calls to the Children Registry (CPS).

Cher Joseph, Director Address Confidentiality Program ("ACP"): ACP is a NYS-sponsored program that provides a legal substitute address to victims of domestic violence, stalking, sexual offenses, and human trafficking to protect their actual location from abusers. Participants receive a substitute mailing address and a certification card to use when interacting with public agencies (such as court), with their mail then forwarded to their real address. This program helps prevent perpetrators from finding victims through public records and is a key part of an overall safety plan.

Dr. Jill Heilman, PhD., specialist on persons with disabilities and neurodivergent brain (non-medical term that refers to the brain working differently than average persons). Judges can ask about a person's disability for equal access in the legal systems. Law Enforcement may ask about a person's disability for safety issues/concerns.

Detective Yadi Regina, New Rochelle Police Department, recommended that parents with children and/or adult child with neurodivergent disabilities meet with their local police department officers to explain their child/family member disability to help the police respond better to the call for assistance with family members with disabilities.

Goals for 2025

- Broaden education and knowledge of domestic violence through members and interested parties
- Increase participation by judiciary and child welfare
- Get real time info on impacts of federal funding cuts/budget
- Increase participation by survivors
- Continued focus on best practices for reducing serious risk of harm

Statement from DV Council Survivor Member

“I was married to an abuser for 32 years. You have no idea how lucky I was that I lived in Westchester County where I got the help and support I needed.”