**July 30, 2021** | 3:15 pm

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**OCTOBER 15, 2020** | Albany, NY

# Governor Cuomo Announces Creation of Regional Domestic Violence Councils to Engage Local Stakeholders in State's Work to Modernize and Improve Services for Survivors

**PUBLIC SAFETY** **(/KEYWORDS/PUBLIC-SAFETY)**

## Councils Are Part of a Broad Effort to Transform Domestic Violence Services Statewide

## During Domestic Violence Awareness Month, New York State Launches Public Awareness Campaign and Announces Financial Relief for Service Providers

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced the launch of Domestic Violence Regional Councils that will address issues around domestic violence services and implement modern changes for improved survivor outcomes. Coordinated by the state Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, the 10 Councils will provide valuable insight from a wide array of domestic violence stakeholders and experts who will help transform and modernize delivery of services for victims, survivors and their families. To mark October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month, OPDV also unveiled its "Survivor Voices, Survivor Choices," public awareness campaign and an updated toolkit (https://opdv.ny.gov/public_awareness/campaigns/shinethelight/shinethelight-current.html) with graphics and other materials available for free to individuals and entities seeking to call attention to domestic violence.

"Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, New York has seen a dramatic increase in the number of domestic violence cases across the state," **Governor Cuomo said.** "New York State is committed to reinventing our systems and methods for helping domestic violence survivors and their families. These regional councils will allow for increased coordination and improved communication between service providers, local stakeholders and state agencies to help stop this dangerous uptick in domestic violence."

Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul today convened the first meeting of stakeholders invited to participate in the Regional Council. More than 200 service providers, advocates and criminal justice and court professionals from across New York joined the virtual meeting.

"The issue of domestic violence is deeply personal for me with my mother being an advocate and starting a transitional home for victims," Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul said. "By bringing together regional representatives from all agencies and providers that deal with the issue of domestic violence, we can address challenges and implement timely solutions to combat this crisis. These councils will allow for better coordination and communication between all stakeholders and result in improved outcomes for victims and survivors, helping to combat abuse and save lives."

"This announcement reflects New York State's commitment to maintaining a position of national leadership in the effort to modernize and transform services for domestic violence victims and survivors," **Secretary to the Governor and Chair of the New York State Council on Women and Girls Melissa DeRosa said. "**The Regional Councils will bring together all agencies and stakeholders that deal with domestic violence to identify issues, coordinate services and implement solutions - ultimately improving our ability to ensure that needs of victims and survivors are met."

The Councils will build upon the work of the 2019 Domestic Violence Task Force and the COVID-19 Domestic Violence Task Force, both convened by Governor Cuomo with the goal of transforming how services are provided, as well as identifying and addressing barriers to access resulting from the global pandemic. The Regional Councils will formalize relationships among agencies and allow all providers to have a voice in critical conversations about domestic violence policies and services.

**Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence Executive Director Kelli Owens said,** "Only by listening to both survivors and service providers will we be able to get the full breadth of information we need to update and improve domestic and sexual violence service delivery in New York State. It is more important than ever to transform services to become more survivor-centered as we continue to deal with the increased safety concerns presented by COVID-19."

The initial, comprehensive virtual meeting will be followed by a series of virtual regional meetings as follows:

- **10/20:** Central New York
- **10/29:** North Country
- **11/05**: Southern Tier
- **11/09:** Mid-Hudson
- **11/12:** Western New York
- **11/19**: Capital Region
- **12/03:** New York City
- **12/07:** Long Island
- **12/10:** Mohawk Valley
- **12/17:** Finger Lakes

The New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence formed the DVRCs while also launching a new public awareness campaign to observe Domestic Violence Awareness Month. "Survivor Voices, Survivor Choices" "recognizes that first person narratives are integral to New York State's efforts to move toward more survivor-centered services and provides a platform for survivor stories on Facebook (https://protect2.fireeye.com/v1/url?k=e3a779a7-bf264bc4-e3a58092-000babd9069e-c4da4ae323c535b3&q=1&e=aa6a42c2-b562-473f-81c7-a08b57d4c17f&u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2FNYSdomesticviolence) and Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/nysopdv/). Graphics and information on domestic violence are also available to share.

Survivors who would like to share their stories can do so by contacting opdvpublicinfo@opdv.ny.gov (mailto:opdvpublicinfo@opdv.ny.gov). Contributors can share their stories - about red flags, experiencing abuse, how they escaped, where they found support and how they are healing - to provide insight for prevention, as well as hope.

New York has also taken actions to eliminate administrative burdens for programs that provide support and services to victims and survivors of domestic violence, as well as victims of other crimes. The state Office of Children and Family Services recently provided $2 million through the federal Family Violence and Prevention Services Act / Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act to programs licensed by the state Office of Children and Family Services to serve victims and survivors of domestic violence. In alignment with the recommendations and priorities outlined in the Task Force report, OCFS gave programs maximum flexibility to use the funding for housing stability, transportation and other services for survivors, to restore full operations and programs to address preparedness for

the future. OCFS awarded 88 grants ranging from $10,000 to $38,000, with all programs able to access those funds immediately.

**OCFS Commissioner Sheila Poole said,** "Sadly, the pandemic has increased the need for critical services for families experiencing domestic violence. No one should be a victim in their own home. OCFS is pleased to administer this funding to nearly 90 domestic violence service providers statewide. These grants will support community agencies in providing immediate help to domestic violence survivors."

The New York State Office of Victim Services also authorized emergency match waivers to ensure continued availability of federal Victims of Crime Act grant funding without meeting the federal requirement to match up to 25 percent of their grant award with cash or in-kind services.

**Office of Victim Services Director Elizabeth Cronin said,** "The COVID-19 global pandemic has placed unprecedented stress on programs that assist crime victims and their families, and Governor Cuomo has made it a priority to overcome these hurdles and provide relief to programs that provide critical services to crime victims. This Match Waiver Policy provides financial flexibility to all current OVS grant recipients and addresses the challenges brought on by the current health crisis."

The Office of Victim Services administers VOCA funding and implemented the emergency waiver to ensure continuity of services while organizations, individuals and families face financial challenges and other hurdles due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The agency exercised new waiver authority, provided by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime, to enable continuation of services such as crisis counseling, legal representation, emergency shelter, and advocacy.

OVS also allowed grant recipients to spend funds that had previously been budgeted for the match requirement to meet immediate needs and alleviates pressure to fulfil volunteer obligations. The agency administers a total of 382 contracts with 224 nonprofit organizations, hospitals, law enforcement agencies and governmental entities that assist domestic violence, sexual assault and human trafficking victims, as well as children, the elderly and other vulnerable populations seeking legal, medical, mental health and other services. Visit ovs.ny.gov/locate-program (ovs.ny.gov/locate-program) for more information.

## Contact the Governor's Press Office


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