News Articles

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GOVERNOR CUOMO ANNOUNCES $1.5 MILLION TO IMPROVE SERVICES FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE THROUGH ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

State-Licensed Service Providers Will Use Federal Funding To Connect With Victims Faced With Increased Isolation

State's COVID-19 Domestic Violence Task Force Identifies Access to Mobile and Remote Advocacy as Critical Need During COVID-19 Surge

New York State is Seeking Proposals To Assist Victims and Survivors With Better Access to Housing

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced more than $1.5 million in federal funding will be directed to state-licensed domestic violence service providers for mobile devices and improved Wi-Fi access. The improved technology will allow programs and shelters to better serve victims and survivors of domestic violence who are facing increased isolation and difficulty accessing services due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. The state's COVID-19 Domestic Violence Task Force recommended that the state prioritize access to mobile advocacy, which is even more critical as the state and nation face a surge of the virus.

Additionally, New York has addressed another Task Force recommendation by issuing a request for

proposals (RFP) to create a housing navigator system in each of the state's 10 regions. Navigators will work with survivors to help them access available resources and housing support beyond shelters and work with advocates to help them better understand the process and assist with their clients' housing needs. The deadline to respond to the RFP, which makes $2.5 million in federal and state funding available for the initiative, is Friday, February 26, 2021. Led by Secretary to the Governor Melissa DeRosa and featuring state

and national experts, the Task Force issued a report with detailed recommendations that were accepted in full by Governor Cuomo last year.

"COVID revealed low tide in America and uncovered the ugliness just beneath the surface," Governor Cuomo said. "One of the indirect consequences has been a spike in domestic violence incidents across the state. Mobile outreach will help us connect individuals and families quickly and offer resources and assistance to get out of dangerous situations. In an increasingly remote world, these technological improvements will be a critical tool for helping particularly hard to reach New Yorkers in rural or isolated areas through COVID and beyond and increase public safety in all our communities."

Melissa DeRosa, Secretary to the Governor and Chair of the Domestic Violence Task Force said, "In this pandemic the number of domestic violence cases increased. We are taking every step possible to help women who are trapped in dangerous situations. We've adopted an innovative approach to best meet the needs of survivors and this additional funding to providers will help ensure that no New Yorker lacks access to critical domestic violence-related services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic."

Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul said, "I'm proud to be part of New York State's efforts to address domestic violence, an issue that my mother devoted herself to when we opened a home for victims and survivors. As we continue to push forward to better serve those who need our support, mobile advocacy can truly transform, modernize and improve the way we meet the needs of victims, survivors and their children through the pandemic and for years to come."

As part of the effort to prioritize access to mobile advocacy, New York State's Office of Children and Family Services, which licenses residential and non-residential domestic violence providers, has awarded $1,529,000 to 89 nonprofit organizations across New York State to purchase and upgrade mobile technology. The need for improved Wi-Fi access at domestic violence shelters, which frequently house parents and children, is critical because many school districts have moved to hybrid or all-remote learning. The federal Victims of Crime Act funding for the initiative was provided by the state Office of Victim Services, which administers those funds for the state and, among other responsibilities, supports a network of programs statewide that provide direct services to victims of crime and their families.

A list of providers receiving awards based on the number of individuals they serve is available here.

These innovative solutions are part of the state's multifaceted strategy to reimagine and transform the way domestic violence services are provided, moving to a system that is survivor-centered, rather than shelter-based. As part of that effort, the state created 10 Domestic Violence Regional Councils to engage local stakeholders - providers, law enforcement, the courts and others - in critical conversations about domestic violence policies and services. In addition to supporting the work of the Regional Councils, the state Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence is coordinating a Survivor Listening Tour to hear directly from individuals about their experiences with the system and how it can be improved.

Office of Children and Family Services Commissioner Sheila J. Poole said, "OCFS is grateful for the partnership and financial support of OVS and is proud to administer this funding to support domestic violence programs in providing robust advocacy remotely. Access to services is vitally important to the well-being of domestic violence survivors and their children, and this will allow programs to find innovative technology solutions to safely reach domestic violence survivors during the pandemic and afterward. Increasing Wi-Fi access in residential programs for victims of domestic violence facilitates education for children who are learning remotely and also assists domestic violence survivors in obtaining information on housing, employment and other needed services - ultimately helping them find safety and security."

Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence Executive Director Kelli Owens said, "Even before the global pandemic hit New York State, we were committed to expanding access to services for all survivors, and especially those who may have challenges accessing traditional methods of service delivery. Access is even more critical during COVID as survivors may be more isolated at home. This funding for mobile advocacy will help our partners across the state deliver safe and continuous support and services to survivors and their families, through the pandemic and beyond."

Office of Victim Services Director Elizabeth Cronin said, "With this funding for mobile advocacy, New York State continues to do everything it can to improve outcomes for victims and survivors. OVS is proud to partner with our sister state agencies to support this critical work with technology solutions, which will make a real difference in the lives of domestic violence victims, survivors and their family members."

Governor Cuomo tasked Secretary DeRosa to lead the COVID-19 Domestic Violence Task Force following a spike in requests for assistance to the state's Domestic and Sexual Assault Hotline during the first few months of the pandemic. That increase - coupled with the recognition that many individuals couldn't safely make phone calls while sheltering in place with their abusers - prompted Governor Cuomo to direct the state Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence to launch a text and chat option. Since going live on April 24 and through November 22, the service has handled nearly 1,300 inquiries. Meanwhile, call volume

to the state hotline increased 33 percent for the first 10 months of 2020 compared to the same time frame last year (7,756 vs. 10,319).

The Governor has long been a champion of survivors and has remained committed to ending domestic violence and gender-based violence. As part of his 2021 State of the State agenda, the Governor proposed a comprehensive package of initiatives including a proposal that would allow courts to require abusers to pay for damages to housing units, moving expenses, and other housing costs related to domestic violence. The Governor also proposed the Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence be transformed into a reimagined agency, the Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, tasked with addressing the intersection of the many forms of intimate partner violence in a survivor-centered and comprehensive manner.

New York State's Domestic and Sexual Violence Hotline can be reached at 1-800-942-6906, text: 844-997-2121 or chat at opdv.ny.gov. For a list of domestic violence hotlines by county, visit the New York State Domestic Violence Directory. The Office of Victim Services also funds a network of more than 200 community-based programs that support victims of crime and their families.

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