



To: Members of the Virginia General Assembly
From: Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence Action Alliance
Date: July 2020
Re: Police Accountability & Reform in Virginia

The Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance, including many of our member sexual and domestic violence agencies (SDVAs) statewide, believe that all people have the right to a life free from sexual and domestic violence and oppression. We recognize that sexual and domestic violence are linked to other forms of oppression which disproportionately affect Black communities, Indigenous communities, women, children, trans and non-binary individuals, and historically marginalized and oppressed people. Given the significant legacy of harm that racism has created for Black Virginians, we are committed to an anti-racist framework¹ from which to respond to and prevent violence.

Our movement has long worked with the criminal justice system, including police, as one option to respond to sexual and domestic violence. Many officers have a history of collaboration with victim advocates in building trauma-informed communities that provide safety and accountability. We acknowledge and value those individual officers who have made significant contributions to bring about change. However, the history and culture of policing in the United States is one that is steeped in self-protection, toxic masculinity, violence, racism, and domination. This has led to institutional responses to violence that are ineffective and unsafe for many victims of sexual and domestic violence and particularly for victims who identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC).² Our movement's reliance on police and criminal response interventions show no indication of reducing rates of violence nor do they provide justice for a majority of victims who choose to report.³ This must change.

Sexual and domestic violence are complex problems requiring equally complex and varied solutions. There is both a sense of urgency and possibility that exists right now – a tipping point for change. **We ask the following of Virginia's policy leaders:**

Stop unnecessary interactions between police and BIPOC communities

- ✓ **Adopt widespread and consistent use of evidence-based risk and lethality assessments** by emergency operators to limit police intervention to those events where lethality and/or risk of escalating violence is high.
- ✓ **End the criminalization of survival strategies** - i.e. low-level drug offenses, panhandling, sex work, victim self-defense - that are often used to justify greater police volume and surveillance of BIPOC communities.

¹ Action Alliance, How Justice Movements Connect: https://www.communitysolutionsva.org/files/How_Justice_Movements_Connect-FINAL.pdf and RJ timeline: http://storage.cloversites.com/virginiasexualdomesticviolenceactionallianc/documents/Racial%20justice%20timeline%202004-2014_3.pdf

² Survived and Punished data: <https://survivedandpunished.org/quick-statistics/>

³ Source: US Department of Justice. <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/rsarp00.pdf>

- ✓ **Interrupt the school-to-prison-pipeline** by reducing police presence in schools and replacing with mental health professionals, social workers, and guidance counselors who are trained in trauma-informed and restorative practices.

Invest in alternatives to policing

- ✓ **Work in partnership with communities to develop alternatives** to policing that support trauma-informed and supportive responses to mental health crises, homelessness, substance use, sexual and domestic violence, and harm with the goal of pre-arrest diversion. For example, Washington D.C.'s use of community crisis teams⁴ and violence interruption programs⁵ ensures that safe and appropriate interventions are available, making it more likely that victims will seek help.
- ✓ **Create statewide and/or community-based reporting options** for victims of sexual assault that do not rely on or involve police interaction.
- ✓ **Support collection of data on high risk sexual and domestic violence perpetration** by Coordinated Community Response (CCR) Teams and/or police for the purposes of response and prevention.
- ✓ **Invest in widespread strategies and campaigns that educate the public** on when to call the police and when to defer to community-based and social service-based responses.

Support transparency and accountability⁶

- ✓ **Require police officers to carry personal liability insurance** to cover costs of brutality or death claims. Abolish qualified immunity, allowing people whose civil rights are violated by police officers to obtain monetary damages and reparations in lawsuits.
- ✓ **Support proposals and legislation for (elected) independent civilian police accountability boards** with power to investigate and determine disciplinary action where appropriate for police officers and administrators.
- ✓ **Support proposals and legislation seeking to improve data collection and transparency** – i.e. stops, arrests, use-of-force, and department budgeting.

Prevent violence by investing in stability, wellness, and wholeness⁷

- ✓ **Fund healthcare infrastructure** (including non-coercive mental healthcare), wellness resources, non-coercive drug and alcohol treatment programming, and training for healthcare professionals. Make these services available or free to low-income residents.
- ✓ **Increase funding to teachers and counselors**, paid family and sick leave for all, child and family tax credits, universal childcare, and supportive policies for all families.
- ✓ **Meaningfully invest in conditions that improve health outcomes**: affordable and safe housing, access to education, safe green space, healthy food, and clean air and water.
- ✓ **Support economies in primarily Black communities to thrive**.⁸

⁴ D.C. Community Response Team Program: <https://dbh.dc.gov/service/community-response-team>

⁵ D.C. Office of Neighborhood Safety & Engagement, "Violence Interrupters" and "Family & Survivor Support": <https://onse.dc.gov/>

⁶ Richmond Transparency & Accountability Project (RTAP): <https://www.richmondvatap.org/campaigns.php>

⁷ Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) IPV Prevention Strategies: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/prevention.html>

⁸ Movement for Black Lives Economic Justice Policy Platform: <https://m4bl.org/policy-platforms/economic-justice/>

- ✓ **Invest in sexual and domestic violence prevention programs⁹** that build skills for handling conflict, teach healthy relationships, transform community institutions to value equity and inclusion, and confront oppression in individuals, relationships, and communities.

We, the undersigned sexual and domestic violence agencies in Virginia, are choosing to move forward together toward our collective vision — a Virginia where ALL people are healthy, safe, respected, and thriving.

Sincerely,

The Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance - Richmond, VA

Sexual Assault Resource Agency (SARA) - Charlottesville, VA

Phoenix Project - Front Royal, VA

Haven of Dan River Region, Inc. - Danville, VA

Council on Domestic Violence for Page County, Inc. - Luray, VA

YWCA South Hampton Roads - Norfolk, VA

The Collins Center - Harrisonburg, VA

Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse (JCADA) - Fairfax, VA

Latinos in Virginia Empowerment Center - Chesterfield, VA

New Directions Center, Inc. - Staunton/Waynesboro, VA

The Center for Sexual Assault Survivors - Newport News, VA

Domestic & Sexual Violence Services, DFS - Fairfax County, VA

First Step: A Response to Domestic Violence, Inc. - Harrisonburg, VA

Transitions Family Violence Services - Hampton, Newport News, Poquoson, and York County, VA

Family Crisis Support Services, Inc. - Norton, VA

Eastern Shore Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ESCADV) - Onancock, VA

Empowerhouse - Fredericksburg, VA

Samaritan House - Virginia Beach, VA

⁹ VA Sexual & Domestic Violence Prevention Fund, SB 297: <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?ses=201&typ=bil&val=sb297>