

**NNEDV**

15<sup>th</sup> Annual  
**Domestic Violence  
Counts Report**

NATIONAL NETWORK TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

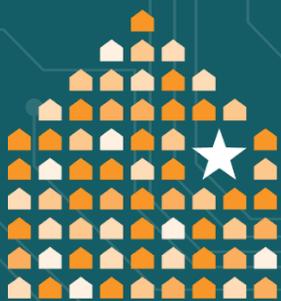


**24-HOUR SURVEY**  
of Domestic Violence  
Shelters and Services

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## Acknowledgements

To the staff at the 1,665 local domestic violence programs who participated in this national count of local domestic violence services during an unprecedented year, thank you for providing a glimpse into the tireless and lifesaving work you do every day. Your efforts continue to shine a light on domestic violence.



**NNEDV**  
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TO END DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE

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# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COUNTS REPORT

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO

May 2021

**O**n behalf of the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV), an organization dedicated to creating a social, political, and economic environment in which domestic violence no longer exists, I am pleased to share our 15<sup>th</sup> annual Domestic Violence Counts Report. Founded over 30 years ago, NNEDV represents the 56 state and territorial coalitions against domestic violence and is a leading voice against violence.

We began conducting this survey fifteen years ago to provide accurate information about how many survivors of domestic violence use shelters and services. Each annual report tells the uplifting stories of survivors receiving lifesaving assistance and the people who work every day to end domestic violence. But it also shares the tragedy of all the survivors who cannot get help and are still in danger because resources are out of reach. We tell these stories so that the public and policymakers at all levels know that more help and urgent public policy changes are needed.

The day of the survey occurred in September 2020, six months after COVID-19 began ravaging the nation. Things changed dramatically for everyone, including survivors and local programs. It was important to us that this report capture both the resiliency of survivors and programs along with the intense impact the pandemic has had on them and their needs. At the same time, 2020 brought other crises: ongoing racial injustice and state-sanctioned violence, multiple natural disasters, and a devastating economic downturn that only exacerbated the struggles and unique needs of programs and the survivors they serve.

NNEDV's Domestic Violence Counts Report always seeks to shed light on the tireless work of advocates at local domestic violence programs. This past year, we saw the heroic efforts of staff in programs as they stretched every penny of funding and leveraged creative approaches to provide essential services to meet survivors' needs under the challenging conditions of 2020.

Despite their efforts, domestic violence programs simply do not have enough funding. Many survivors and their children are turned away when shelters are full or counselors are unavailable. Programs did not always have personal protective equipment (PPE), cleaning equipment, or enough funding to provide survivors with transportation or safe places to stay when shelters were practicing social distancing. In 2020, existing barriers to safety for survivors—like a lack of housing, and intense needs for hotel and motel stays, childcare, and economic security—were further exacerbated by the pandemic. Survivors of color experienced these barriers more acutely, due to ongoing oppression, racism, and systemic discrimination that often prevent them from accessing the resources they need.

This report provides a snapshot of the services provided and unmet needs on a single day. On September 10, 2020, local programs were unable to meet 11,047 requests for services—primarily requests for housing or emergency shelter—because programs lacked sufficient resources. These numbers are alarming on their own, but the true scope of the problem is worse; many survivors had limited access to help because of the pandemic or have no services in their communities.



For these survivors, we must, and can, do better. With your help, we can encourage the Biden-Harris Administration and Congress to ensure that all survivors get the support they need, including:

- **Centering the needs of survivors of color** in all legislation, appropriations, and policymaking, and supporting funding and policies that reduce barriers to safety and justice for survivors who face past or ongoing oppression and systemic discrimination.
- **Reforming systems that disproportionately harm Communities of Color**, including the criminal justice and child welfare systems.
- **Implementing COVID-19 relief funds and policies** to allow local programs to meet the immediate and longer-term needs of survivors and increase access to housing, health, and economic resources for all survivors.
- **Reauthorizing and improving the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)** by enhancing access to safety, justice, and economic stability for all survivors; increasing prevention; reducing reliance on systems that are not helping all survivors; creating new resources for survivors of color; maintaining protections for LGBTQIA+ survivors; and expanding tribal jurisdiction.
- **Reauthorizing and improving the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA)** by bolstering existing programs; increasing funding for culturally specific programs serving Communities of Color; and scaling up prevention strategies to reach every community.
- **Saving the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA)** and supporting over 6,000 local organizations that rely on VOCA's non-taxpayer funding source—the Crime Victims Fund—to provide lifesaving direct services.
- **Enacting policies that promote financial security, workplace protections, and economic justice for survivors**; and increasing survivors' access to housing, childcare, transportation, legal assistance, and other comprehensive services tailored to their needs.

Visit [NNEDV.org/TakeAction](https://NNEDV.org/TakeAction) to join us in calling for a strong federal response to domestic violence.

With gratitude,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deborah J. Vagins".

Deborah J. Vagins  
President and CEO  
National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV)





# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COUNTS REPORT

## NATIONAL EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On September 10, 2020, 1,665 out of 1,921 (87%) identified domestic violence programs in the United States participated in this national count of domestic violence services. Services provided by domestic violence programs looked different in 2020, as frontline advocates navigated unforeseen challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises. The following figures represent the information shared by the participating programs about the services they provided during the 24-hour survey period.

### 76,525 Victims Served in One Day

38,586 adult and child victims of domestic violence found refuge in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or other housing provided by local domestic violence programs.

37,939 adult and child victims received non-residential assistance and services, including counseling, legal advocacy, children’s support groups, and more.

19,478 contacts; NNEDV’s WomensLaw legal Email Hotline received 19 emails; and National Domestic Violence Hotline staff received 1,824 contacts. Altogether, hotline staff received an average of almost 15 contacts every minute of the survey day.

### 10,091 Individuals Attended Prevention and Educational Trainings

On the survey day, despite the limitations caused by the pandemic, local domestic violence programs educated 10,091 individuals in communities across the United States. Advocates provided 775 trainings that addressed domestic violence prevention, early intervention, and more. While substantially fewer than in previous years, this represents a triumph of programs still finding ways to reach their communities.

### 11,047 Unmet Requests for Services in One Day

Victims made 11,047 requests for services—including emergency shelter, housing, transportation, childcare, legal representation, and more—that could not be provided because programs lacked the resources to meet victims’ needs. Approximately 57 percent of these unmet requests were for housing and emergency shelter.

Greatly increased funding would enable domestic violence programs to provide comprehensive services to all survivors seeking help and to prevent violence in their communities.

Table 1: Services Provided on 9/10/20	% of Programs Providing Services
Emergency Shelter	75%
Children’s Support or Advocacy	52%
Court Accompaniment or Legal Advocacy	48%
Support/Advocacy Related to Housing/Landlord	46%
Transportation	45%
Transitional or Other Housing	43%
Support/Advocacy Related to Mental Health	42%

### 21,321 Hotline Contacts Received

Domestic violence hotlines are a lifeline for victims in danger, providing support, information, safety planning, and resources via phone, chat, text, and/or email. During the 24-hour survey period: local, state, and territorial hotline staff received

❖ From an advocate in Washington, DC: “We need more funding and support, especially for culturally specific programs. Our organization is underfunded, but we’re making it work in order to serve survivors who are counting on us during this unprecedented time.”



“During COVID-19, survivors and their children have been forced to stay with abusers or risk their health in shelter. These survivors are overwhelmingly low-income, Black or brown women **who often hold essential worker positions and keep the country running** but do not have equitable access to housing resources.”

– NEW YORK ADVOCATE

## SPOTLIGHT ON COVID-19

# Pandemic Intensifies Existing Barriers to Safety for Survivors and Strains Already-Limited Resources for Programs

The COVID-19 pandemic reduced options for survivors, because temporary closures, social-distancing measures, and strains on both staff and resources meant fewer available services and interventions. Many shelters limited their capacities in order to keep residents safe from the virus. Advocates shifted to providing remote and digital services with little time to prepare. Court closures and virtual court hearings left many survivors feeling as though legal help was delayed or out of reach. Existing barriers to safety for survivors, like a lack of housing, childcare, and economic security, were further exacerbated. Survivors of color experienced these barriers more acutely, due to ongoing oppression, racism, and systemic discrimination that often prevent them from accessing the resources they need.

Programs made unexpected investments to ensure they could keep their doors open and safely provide services. Due to the pandemic,

thirty-six percent of programs reported more than \$25,000 in additional or unplanned spending in order to maintain services. For many programs, this can be catastrophic for their budgets in both the current year and into the next. Programs used these funds to procure PPE; upgrade technology in order to provide digital services; pay for hotel nights or rental assistance for survivors; cover unexpected transportation costs; and address other urgent needs.

“Our agency has spent \$233,260 in unexpected costs for PPE, technology, hotel nights to house survivors, rental and utilities assistance, hazard pay, transportation, and disinfecting costs. We are fortunate that we have been able to receive additional funding here and there, but that will not last forever and not every agency is lucky enough to even have what we do.”

– Massachusetts advocate

# ▶▶▶ In Just One Day...

On September 10, 2020, NNEDV conducted its 15<sup>th</sup> annual Domestic Violence Counts survey, a one-day unduplicated count of domestic violence services requested and received across the United States. This report summarizes findings, including the number of individuals accessing services, the services requested, the number of unmet requests, and the experiences of survivors and advocates.<sup>1</sup>

NNEDV conducted the 2020 Domestic Violence Counts survey under extraordinary circumstances, as participating local programs provided shelter and services while navigating the seventh month of a global pandemic. Of the 1,921 domestic violence programs and shelters identified<sup>2</sup> nationwide, 1,665 programs<sup>3</sup> in all fifty states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Virgin Islands participated. For fifteen years, the Domestic Violence Counts Report has been the premier trusted source of data on the lifesaving services that domestic violence advocates provide to survivors every day.

In just one day, 76,525 adults and children received essential domestic violence services. Emergency shelters and housing programs provided refuge for 38,586 adult and child victims, and an additional 37,939 adults and children received support and advocacy through non-residential services, such as counseling, childcare, courtroom advocacy, and other services. Local, state, territorial, and national domestic violence advocates received 21,321 hotline contacts<sup>4</sup> and provided 775 trainings on domestic violence prevention, early intervention, and related topics to 10,091 people.

The national count also provides sobering data on requests for services that go unfulfilled. Unfortunately, 11,047 requests for services went unmet on the survey day due to a lack of resources. Programs continue to face insufficient funding at the federal, tribal, state, territorial, and local levels, which impact their ability to provide services to all survivors in need.

As advocates continue to help survivors navigate the pandemic and other crises, more resources are necessary to help programs provide ongoing support. Survivors' needs during an immediate crisis vary, but many programs saw a distinct increase in requests for shelter and assistance once stay-at-home orders were lifted. Many survivors also need access to low-barrier cash assistance and stimulus funds. Annual and supplemental funds provided by the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA), the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's "DV Bonus Funds" are essential federal funding streams for victim services. Despite the urgent need for domestic violence services, many programs are forced to reduce services or close their doors when faced with a decrease in funding.

**In a year of many intersecting crises, domestic violence programs and frontline workers continued to do what they always do—provide advocacy and safe harbor to survivors in danger. Programs need adequate funding and resources so that advocates can provide compassionate advocacy and offer refuge to every victim who reaches out for help.**

<sup>1</sup> Quotes have been edited for length and to protect victims' and survivors' anonymity.

<sup>2</sup> For a local program to qualify for participation in the Domestic Violence Counts survey day, one of its primary purposes must be domestic violence services.

<sup>3</sup> 86.7 percent of eligible programs participated.

<sup>4</sup> On the survey day, local, state, and territorial hotline staff received 19,478 contacts; NNEDV's WomensLaw legal Email Hotline received 19 emails; and National Domestic Violence Hotline staff received 1,824 contacts. Altogether, hotline staff received an average of almost 15 contacts every minute of the survey day.

# VICTIMS SERVED



## REAL STORIES

"A survivor and her children were exhausted from dealing with constant abuse. Our advocates helped them develop a safety plan and obtain an apartment. She told us, 'I feel like I can finally breathe again, and I'm not walking on eggshells all the time. This is so amazing.'"

– Arkansas advocate

"Essential workers in the immigrant communities we serve have continued working through the pandemic, but they fear that they will be deported from COVID-19 testing sites. Asian immigrants in particular have become the targets of racist hatred and blame for the virus, which has put them in danger."

– Indiana advocate

### Domestic Violence Programs Provide Refuge and Advocacy during Times of Crisis

While stay-at-home orders were a public health necessity in 2020, they often forced survivors to remain in close proximity to their abusers, putting them further in danger. Sadly, many abusive partners took advantage of this situation to exert further power and control. It is critical that programs have the resources necessary to provide support to survivors as they navigate an uncertain, stressful, and dangerous time in their lives.

Table 2: Victims Served on 9/10/20	Emergency Shelter	Transitional or Other Housing	Non-Residential Services	Total
Adults	9,947	8,460	30,325	48,732
Children	9,336	10,843	7,614	27,793
Total	19,283	19,303	37,939	76,525

### Answering the Call

Domestic violence hotlines are often the first point of contact for survivors seeking help, providing desperately needed information and support. On September 10, 2020, local, state, territorial, and national domestic violence hotlines received 21,321 contacts (averaging 888 contacts per hour or almost 15 contacts per minute).<sup>5</sup>

### Shelter and Housing Services Provide Safety

One immediate need for survivors escaping abuse is safe shelter or housing. The pandemic has forced many survivors to stay in close proximity to abusive partners and has limited access to social support systems,<sup>6</sup> while reduced shelter space has increased the need for affordable, long-term housing. Many survivors have lost jobs and income as a result of closures from COVID-19, further jeopardizing their ability to maintain stable housing.

### Creating Pathways from Shelter to Permanent Safe Housing

For survivors in emergency shelter, the path to long-term housing can be difficult. Financial abuse, which occurs in 99 percent of domestic violence cases,<sup>7</sup> often results in ruined credit, making it difficult to obtain a lease or mortgage, where credits checks are required. Many domestic violence programs offer transitional housing, rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing, or other options to help survivors obtain safe housing.

Survivors frequently face housing waitlists or other significant barriers in their search for permanent housing due to a lack of safe, affordable housing options in their region—shortages that have only been exacerbated by the pandemic. A Maine advocate shared the stark impact: "Last year, we provided 40 nights of shelter to 16 clients. This year, we have provided 2,767 nights of shelter to 65 clients. With shelters full, rental availability limited, and many clients out of work, there is no longer-term option to which they can transition."

<sup>5</sup> On the survey day, local, state, and territorial hotline staff received 19,478 contacts; NNEDV's WomensLaw legal Email Hotline received 19 emails; and National Domestic Violence Hotline staff received 1,824 contacts.

<sup>6</sup> Kaukinen, Catherine, "When Stay-at-Home Orders Leave Victims Unsafe at Home: Exploring the Risk and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence during the COVID-19 Pandemic," American Journal of Criminal Justice (2020).

<sup>7</sup> Adams, Adrienne, "Measuring the Effects of Domestic Violence on Women's Financial Well-Being," University of Wisconsin-Madison, Center for Financial Security (2011).

### Opening the Door

On September 10, 2020: A total of 19,283 adult and child victims found refuge in emergency shelter, while transitional housing or other housing programs safely housed 19,303 adults and children. Seventy-five percent of reporting programs provided emergency shelter and 43 percent provided transitional or other housing services.

A Connecticut advocate shared: "We were able to offer transitional housing to a survivor living in our emergency shelter with her children. She began to cry and said it was the first time that she'd felt happy in a very long time. She is undocumented, and safe housing will allow her to focus on working with an immigration attorney and heal from her trauma."

### Comprehensive and Compassionate Advocacy and Support

Beyond safe housing, the path to healing and rebuilding after abuse is made easier with the help of trained, compassionate advocates who let victims know they are not alone. Many survivors of domestic violence need support and counseling from trained advocates to help overcome repeated psychological or emotional trauma. Domestic violence services emphasize victims' strengths beyond the trauma they have experienced. Advocates follow survivors' leads in developing individualized safety plans and connecting with other community resources and services.

An advocate in Louisiana shared: "On the survey day, I met with an anxious new client. We normalized her feelings of fear and uncertainty and reflected on her strengths of survival, resilience, and motivation. It took a safe place, a supportive team, and lots of resources for her to feel empowered in her journey to independence. For the first time, she felt confident in her decision not to return to her abusive partner."

Local programs provide vital support and services, including legal advocacy, counseling, job-readiness services, and help with safety planning, transportation, childcare, and overcoming financial abuse. This range of services can

include initiatives tailored to the needs of diverse communities who often face increased barriers to safety and justice, such as survivors who are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, or agender/ asexual (LGBTQIA+) survivors; immigrant survivors; and survivors who are experiencing mental illness or addiction or living with disabilities. To fully serve all survivors, programs need increased resources to address structural barriers to safety and to expand specialized services and outreach.

An Oregon advocate shared: "Victims of color and LGBTQIA+ victims are more afraid than ever to report crimes to law enforcement, as they are worried that the situation will escalate unnecessarily or end in a wrongful death. With every barrier created for the average person in America, survivors of domestic violence experience it ten-fold."

### Helping Survivors Heal

On September 10, 2020: Overall, 37,939 individuals received essential supportive services in non-residential programs, including:

Table 3: Non-Residential Services Provided on 9/10/20	% of Programs Providing Services
Children's Support or Advocacy	52%
Court Accompaniment or Legal Advocacy	48%
Support/Advocacy Related to Housing/Landlord	46%
Transportation	45%
Support/Advocacy Related to Mental Health	42%
Support/Advocacy Related to Public Benefits/TANF/Welfare	39%
Bilingual Advocacy	35%

From an advocate in Michigan: "After years of abuse, one client was ready to get a divorce. As we drove back to the office after consulting with a lawyer, she was quiet, so I asked her if she was okay. When she turned her face to me, I saw she was beaming with joy. She told me she hadn't dared to dream about a bright future in more than twenty years."



## Prevention Through Education: Ending Domestic Violence Starts with Outreach at the Community Level

Ending domestic violence requires an investment in prevention services, including community education and outreach. Domestic violence programs across the country engage in proven prevention strategies that help to change social norms, raise awareness, and reduce incidents of domestic violence.

Education is a powerful prevention tool that helps individuals identify relationship red flags, resources for seeking help, and the hallmarks of healthy relationships. This helps to prevent domestic violence and encourages survivors to seek help.

Through specialized trainings, domestic violence advocates help professionals who work with survivors gain knowledge about trauma-informed care and the nuances of survivor-centered service provision. When social service employees, judges, first responders, attorneys, and medical professionals understand the nature of domestic violence, they are better equipped to protect and support survivors.

A Washington, DC, advocate said: "Since the pandemic began, we have relied on our strong partnerships with government and community-based organizations to address gaps and challenges. Our goal is to keep survivors' needs and safety at the center of this process."

### Forging Community Connections and Expanding Knowledge

On September 10, 2020: Despite the limitations of COVID-19, advocates still managed to provide 775 trainings to 10,091 students, parents, teachers, law enforcement officers, mental health providers, attorneys, child protective services employees, and other professionals. While substantially fewer than in previous years, this represents a triumph of programs still finding ways to reach their communities.



## REAL STORIES

"When victims and survivors reached out during the pandemic, they described more intense violence, more desperate situations, and often a sense of hopelessness for safety. We started a chat line to give survivors options to reach out, and we had our first contact within hours of opening it."

– Maryland advocate

"One survivor suffered years of trauma and abuse. When she came to our shelter, she cried with relief. The next morning, she told us it was the first time she had slept peacefully in months."

– Arizona advocate

## LANGUAGE ACCESS IMPROVES SUPPORT SERVICES

For millions of individuals across the United States who do not use English as their primary language, who have limited English proficiency,<sup>8</sup> or who are part of the Deaf/hard of hearing community, accessing domestic violence services can be difficult. Programs sometimes struggle to find resources for meaningful language access, which leaves survivors without the help they need. When programs have the resources to invest in accessible services, they are able to improve the quality of care and outcomes for more survivors. This is one of many reasons that culturally and linguistically specific shelters and services are urgently needed.

An Illinois advocate shared this story: "We worked with a Deaf Black survivor who hadn't been able to receive the accessible services she needed. We gave her shelter and counseling and, with our support, she was accepted into college and has made strides to reclaim her independence."

<sup>8</sup> US Census Bureau, "Census Bureau Reports at Least 350 Languages Spoken in US Homes," Newsroom (2015).

“A survivor told us: ‘My children and I lived in your safe house while you helped us heal from trauma and provided us with transitional housing. Now, I’ve started my own business, I’m working on repairing my credit, and I’m hopeful for the future. **This apartment equals stability and freedom for me and my children.**”

– NEW JERSEY ADVOCATE



# DEVASTATING UNMET NEEDS



## REAL STORIES

“Lack of public transportation and affordable housing are huge disadvantages that our community and clients face. It limits what they can accomplish and often keeps them feeling helpless.”

– North Carolina advocate

“The dearth of available, stable housing options continues to be a barrier for survivors who are homeless due to domestic violence. This becomes even more dire for survivors struggling with mental health concerns or substance abuse. These survivors often have no choice but to return to abusive partners.”

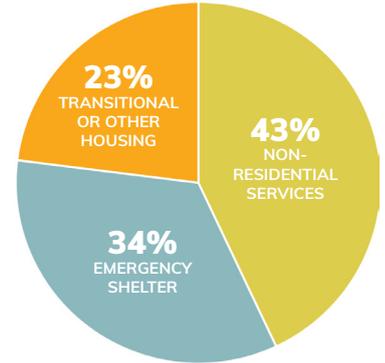
– Pennsylvania advocate

### A Lack of Resources Leads to Devastating Unmet Needs

Domestic violence programs are a lifeline for survivors who often face imminent danger when attempting to leave abusive partners. However, many programs struggle to maintain stable funding, diminishing their ability to provide comprehensive services, particularly for high-demand needs like housing, legal representation, and mental health services. These shortfalls are felt more acutely during natural disasters or public health crises. COVID-19 has forced programs to redirect already-limited funding to unexpected expenses, like PPE, technology improvements, hazard pay, and more, to protect the health of staff and survivors.

Programs need access to emergency funding during disasters and other crises, as well as reliable, regular funding to ensure they are equipped to serve all survivors. Unfortunately, many organizations struggle to maintain stable funding year-to-year.

An Indiana advocate shared: “The amount of funding we receive directly impacts the services that are available for our most vulnerable populations. Safety is a basic human right, but we have seen dramatic funding cuts recently that may not allow us to sustain our program.”



**CHART 1:**  
BREAKDOWN OF UNMET REQUESTS ON 9/10/20

### Unmet Requests for Domestic Violence Services

Unmet Requests on 9/10/20	Emergency Shelter (34%)	Transitional or Other Housing (23%)	Non-Residential Services (43%)	Total
Adults	2,362	1,179	3,764	7,305
Children	1,349	1,411	982	3,742
Total	3,711	2,590	4,746	11,047

### Unanswered Calls for Help

On September 10, 2020: Tragically, there were 11,047 requests for services that participating programs were unable to provide due to a lack of resources.

### Safe Housing is Often Out of Reach for Survivors in Need

Secure housing is a critical resource for survivors escaping abuse, but it is often difficult to obtain. Limited access to safe housing has been further exacerbated by COVID-19, with many programs reducing emergency shelter capacity to ensure proper social distancing.

On the survey day, 28 percent of participating programs provided hotel or motel stays for survivors—more than double the rate from 2019—but this can be extremely costly. Without secure housing available, victims are faced with the choice of staying with abusive partners or risking homelessness.

A Washington advocate shared: “To maintain social distancing, we had to reduce the number of individuals in our shelter. We had limited access to

emergency COVID-19 funding through our state to provide hotel stays, but these funds were depleted by the end of September, and our capacity to provide shelter was reduced by approximately 80 to 85 percent."

Survivors face numerous barriers to securing permanent housing, which forces them to stay in emergency shelter for longer periods of time. Many domestic violence programs offer transitional housing or other housing options, including short-term rental assistance paired with services, to meet survivors' diverse housing needs. However, these highly sought-after, effective programs are often at capacity or unavailable. High unemployment and financial insecurity caused by the pandemic have also impacted survivors in shelters, who are unable to obtain permanent housing without employment.

Advocates often scramble to find alternate options for survivors in dire situations when housing programs are at capacity. In Ohio, an advocate reported: "The challenges that our clients face—such as employment and housing—seem to have become even more difficult due to COVID-19. With little or no way to secure financial stability or housing, we can't give survivors the help they need."

Even with housing secured, survivors often need additional, comprehensive services. An advocate in Washington shared: "Affordable, safe childcare is domestic violence prevention. Accessible job training and education is domestic violence prevention. Programs for those with evictions, poor credit, or no credit are domestic violence prevention. Food security is domestic violence prevention. How can someone leave a violent situation when they don't know if they will be any safer out of it?"

### Loss of Housing Services

In 2020: Due to funding cuts, 104 programs reported that they had to reduce or eliminate alternative housing services, such as hotel or motel stays. Currently, 44 percent of domestic violence programs provide transitional housing as part of their services throughout the year, but because of funding cuts, 88 programs had to

reduce or eliminate transitional housing services.

### Staffing Cuts Lead to Unmet Needs and a Reduction in Services

Most programs operate on limited budgets, with a large portion of services dependent on local, state, territorial, and federal government grants. Others may rely on private donations to help fill gaps, which can be highly variable, and some funders were also impacted by the ongoing economic downturn. Funding cuts, and uncertainty about sustainable funding, leave programs vulnerable, leading to layoffs and a reduction in critical services for victims in need. In response to COVID-19, some programs have been forced to make unplanned cuts to staffing as well.

An advocate in South Dakota reported: "All of our part-time staff have been furloughed since March 2020, and our 24-hour program is being run by only three full-time staff. We were hoping that all of these changes would be temporary, but we now wonder if this is our agency's new normal."

### Lack of Legal Services May Lead to Further Victimization

Through their legal advocacy work, many programs are a source of support for survivors navigating the complex legal system. COVID-19, however, deeply impacted legal services for programs. With courthouses closed across the country, many survivors faced delays while seeking protection orders, divorces, or child support. With virtual hearings taking place, many legal advocates were unable to accompany survivors to provide support. Some programs had to cut legal services due to decreased funding, while remaining lawyers are facing an increase in caseloads, leaving some survivors without options for representation.

A Nebraska advocate stated: "One survivor had full custody of her children, but her abusive partner was threatening to file for emergency custody. We were unable to find legal assistance for her case. She left our office defeated and worried that she was going to lose her children."

Going to court can be a source of further victimization for survivors as abusers often



"One survivor told us: 'The love and generous support from your organization have been monumental in helping me build and maintain a strong foundation. **I can raise my babies in a home with love and laughter instead of the worry of violence.**'"

– GEORGIA ADVOCATE

manipulate the legal system to extend cases and financially drain survivors. Legal advocates and attorneys at local programs can help ensure that survivors do not face the legal system alone.

<b>Table 5:</b> Services Reduced or Eliminated in 2020	Number of Programs Reducing or Eliminating Services
Hotel/Motel Stay	<b>104</b>
Transitional or Other Housing	<b>88</b>
Legal Representation by an Attorney	<b>81</b>
Childcare/Daycare	<b>80</b>
Prevention and/or Educational Programs	<b>71</b>
Transportation	<b>66</b>
Matched Savings Programs and/or Microloans	<b>63</b>
Therapy/Counseling for Children or Youth (by a licensed practitioner)	<b>61</b>
Safe Exchange/Visitation	<b>58</b>
Onsite Medical Services	<b>57</b>

### Representing Survivors

On September 10, 2020: 48 percent of programs were able to provide court accompaniment or legal advocacy to victims, but only 14 percent of programs were able to assist victims with legal representation by an attorney.

In 2020: 32 programs reduced or eliminated their court accompaniment or legal advocacy services and 81 reduced or eliminated their provision of legal representation by an attorney.

### Lack of Transportation is a Significant Barrier that Impacts Survivors' Safety

Transportation costs can be a huge barrier to safety for survivors escaping abuse, especially since some abusers choose to limit their partners' access to vehicles as a means of further controlling them, or some survivors lack the means or access to purchase their own cars. For survivors in rural areas, limited shelter options and a lack of public transportation make

it difficult to seek help. If a survivor needs to relocate to a different city, county, or state to escape an abuser, the cost for bus or train fare, taxis, or plane tickets can often be too expensive. Survivors should not have to be further isolated or endangered because of a lack of transportation options.

Unreliable transportation is also a major barrier to finding or maintaining employment. Access to public transportation has been especially difficult during the pandemic, with many bus and train systems running on limited schedules. If a survivor cannot work from home and is unable to get to work regularly, it is more difficult to keep a job and obtain housing, legal services, childcare, and other necessary resources.

When domestic violence programs have adequate funding, advocates are able to provide transportation assistance to survivors via bus vouchers, gas cards, and other transportation-related resources. Providing this service can be life-changing for a survivor. An Arizona advocate shared: "A survivor was preparing to leave her abusive partner after more than twenty years. We were able to provide her with free rideshare transportation codes so she could safely travel to and from court. She told us, 'This is the first time I have felt supported in a long time.'"

### Lack of Transportation

In 2020: 66 programs reduced or eliminated transportation for survivors.

### Limited Resources and Services Further Marginalize Underserved Victims

Victims of domestic violence come from all walks of life, but many survivors in marginalized or underserved communities experience higher rates of abuse along with greater systemic barriers to seeking help and accessing resources. Survivors who are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color; LGBTQIA+ survivors; immigrant survivors; and survivors who are experiencing mental illness or addiction or living with disabilities face unique barriers and discrimination, making access to domestic violence services difficult.

COVID-19 has also had a disproportionate impact

❖ “The continued murders of Black and brown people across the nation, including Black and brown trans people and detained individuals, have had profound impacts on our health and wellbeing. It is extremely hard for the advocates doing this work to show up each day when they see their communities being harmed and killed.” – Washington advocate

on marginalized communities, with many suffering increased negative health and financial outcomes compared to the general population.<sup>9</sup>

To meet the unique needs of survivors from these communities requires culturally competent and accessible services and programs, as well as federal reforms that address systemic discrimination and other barriers.

Many survivors from marginalized communities do not feel comfortable relying on legal systems when seeking justice and safety, out of fear of discrimination and racism. Some immigrant survivors must make the difficult decision between enduring the abuse or risking deportation. Black survivors and survivors of color may hesitate to access domestic violence services out of fear of law enforcement and state violence. Long-standing racial discrimination in housing has exacerbated the needs of survivors of color. Programs must understand and respond to all survivors’ unique and intersecting needs, especially those who face systemic barriers.

An advocate from Texas shared: “Most Spanish-speaking survivors we work with are afraid to contact the police, thinking that they could be deported. Immigrant survivors are not applying for public benefits because they are afraid that it could affect their immigration status.”

An advocate from New York shared: “The pandemic has highlighted the inequities facing survivors in the LGBTQIA+ community, including transgender, gender non-conforming, and nonbinary individuals, youth, People of Color, immigrants, and those living in poverty. They remain disproportionately affected by both violence and COVID-19, while also facing barriers to accessing healthcare and other services. Many are reporting a lack of response from law enforcement, along with fears of discrimination, harassment, and wrongful arrest.”

Survivors in the LGBTQIA+ community also experience discrimination that may stop them from reaching out for help. They may have concerns about unwelcoming staff at domestic violence programs or limited sensitivity to the barriers they face. Many victim services organizations, law enforcement, and the legal system do not fully understand the dynamics of domestic violence within the LGBTQIA+ community, leading to further victimization.

Survivors who have a disability or have a dependent with a disability, as well as survivors who are elderly, may encounter difficulties finding programs that offer accessible housing and services. Survivors in these communities may rely on abusive partners for care or financial support, making it harder to leave and establish financial stability.

### Supporting Underserved Victims

Table 6: Services Provided by Local Programs	% of Programs Providing on 9/10/20	% of Programs Providing Throughout 2020
Bilingual Advocacy	35%	66%
Support/ Advocacy Related to Immigration	20%	78%
Support/ Advocacy for LGBTQIA+ Victims of Abuse	17%	88%
Support/ Advocacy Related to Disability Issues	16%	72%

### Lack of Affordable Childcare is a Barrier to Safety

For survivors with children, access to safe and affordable childcare is vital. Without affordable childcare, it is difficult to secure or keep employment, complete an education, or meet

<sup>9</sup>Abedi, Vida et al. “Racial, Economic, and Health Inequality and COVID-19 Infection in the United States,” Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities (2020).

with service providers. COVID-19 has made access to childcare more inaccessible, with many schools and childcare centers closed or raising prices in response to an increase in demand, coupled with an inability to safely bring non-family members into the home. Some domestic violence programs have also stopped providing childcare services. Unfortunately, without stable funding, domestic violence programs do not always have the resources to assist survivors in need of childcare.

An advocate in Kentucky shared: "A pregnant shelter resident lost her job due to a lack of childcare for her older children. She has been so unsure of her future, and I fear every day that she will leave shelter and return to her abusive partner."

#### Loss of Childcare Services

In 2020: 80 participating programs reduced or eliminated childcare or daycare.

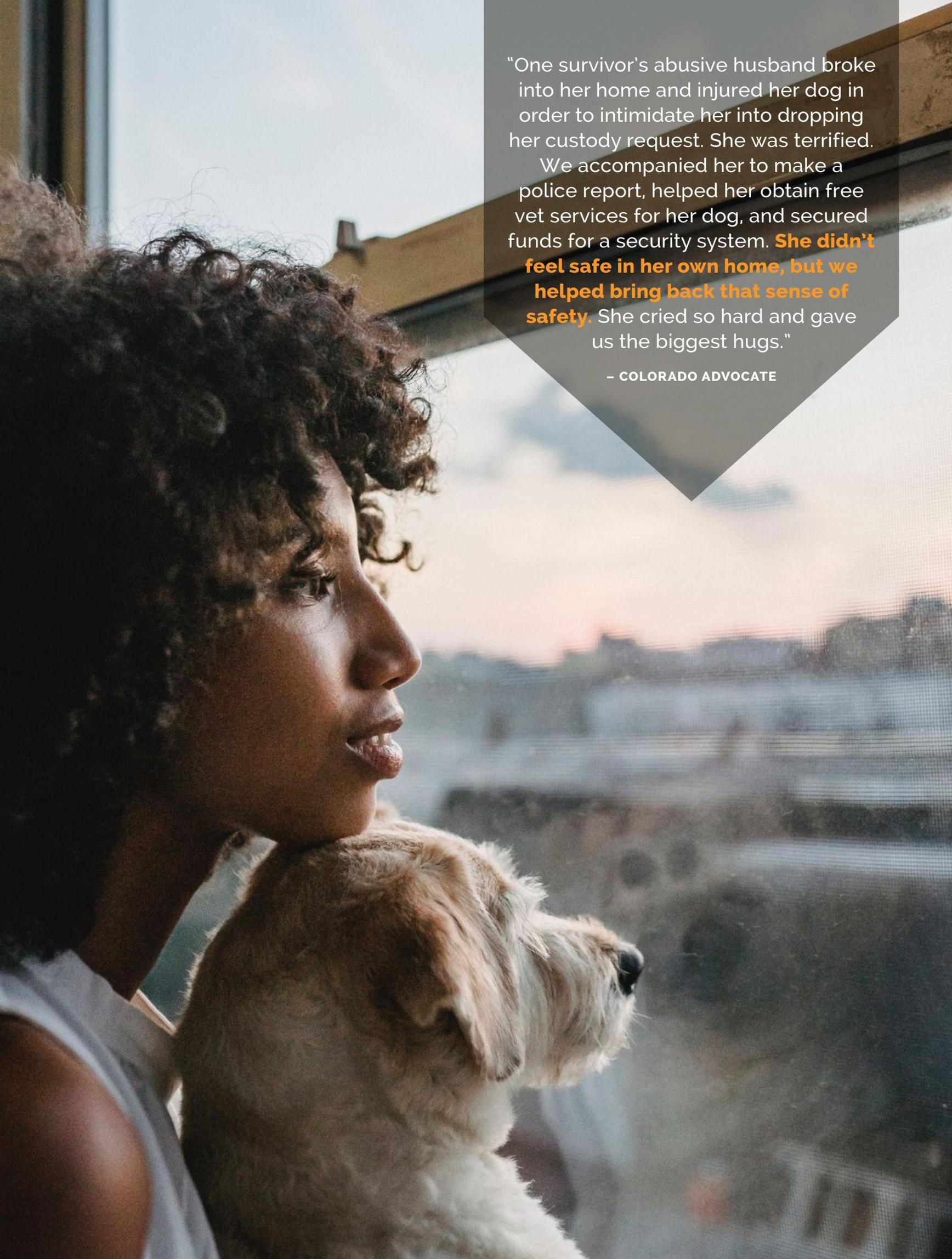


## ✦ REAL STORIES ✦

"One survivor called us from out of state fearing for her life. We happily welcomed her into our shelter and helped her find a job and housing. When she left, she thanked us, saying, 'You all loved and believed in me when I couldn't truly love and believe in myself.'" – [Utah advocate](#)

"A survivor in the LGBTQIA+ community told us that they struggled to categorize their experience as domestic violence because of their identity. Our counselor validated their feelings and provided education, and they teared up, saying they were grateful to feel seen." – [Massachusetts advocate](#)

"A survivor wrote us this note: 'One year ago, I entered your shelter in tears, terrified, and alone. Now, I am a completely different person, and I owe it to you. I sleep with both eyes closed, I no longer live in fear of every sound I hear, and I no longer cringe when I am touched. For the first time in a very long time, I look forward to the future.'" – [Missouri advocate](#)

A woman with dark, curly hair is shown in profile, looking out a window. A light-colored dog is sitting on the windowsill in front of her, also looking out. The background shows a cityscape at dusk or dawn, with buildings and a sky with soft light. A dark grey semi-transparent box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing text.

“One survivor’s abusive husband broke into her home and injured her dog in order to intimidate her into dropping her custody request. She was terrified.

We accompanied her to make a police report, helped her obtain free vet services for her dog, and secured funds for a security system. **She didn’t feel safe in her own home, but we helped bring back that sense of safety.** She cried so hard and gave us the biggest hugs.”

– COLORADO ADVOCATE

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### **No Victim Should Be Left Behind: Ending Abuse Requires Federal Investments**

In just one day, advocates helped bolster survivors' resilience with resources and support. Local programs keep our communities safer and invest in a violence-free future. Domestic violence programs undertake this, and other lifesaving work, every day of the year.

But each year, advocates also report a shocking number of unmet requests from survivors who desperately need help, as well as a multitude of systemic barriers facing survivors as they try to rebuild their lives.

Our nation is in the midst of multiple, intersecting crises that exacerbate disparities and endanger survivors of domestic violence. To make real strides in reducing gender-based violence during this challenging time, we are urging Congress and the Biden-Harris Administration to invest in strategies that prevent violence and advance access to safety, justice, and economic stability for survivors while reducing reliance on systems that are not helping all survivors.

We must center the needs of historically marginalized survivors by supporting funding and policies that reduce barriers to safety and justice for survivors who face ongoing oppression and discrimination.

We call on Congress and the Biden-Harris Administration to:

- **Center the needs of survivors of color** in all legislation, appropriations, and policymaking by listening to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color leaders in the domestic violence field; supporting funding and policies that reduce barriers to safety and justice for survivors who face past or ongoing oppression and systemic discrimination; and using a racial equity lens in evaluating policy proposals.
- **Reform systems that disproportionately harm Communities of Color**, including the criminal justice and child welfare systems.



- **Save the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA).** Over 6,000 local organizations rely on funds from VOCA to provide lifesaving direct services to victims of all types of crime annually. Without VOCA funds, many victim service programs would cease to exist, leaving victims and survivors with nowhere to turn. Recent declining deposits into VOCA's non-taxpayer funding source—the Crime Victims Fund—have drastically reduced VOCA funding and will continue to do so unless Congress acts urgently.
- **Implement COVID-19 relief funds and policies** to allow local programs to meet the immediate and longer-term needs of survivors and increase access to housing, health, and economic resources for all survivors; and prepare for the next crisis or natural disaster through cross-system training and collaboration. Additionally, Congress must reduce barriers to direct relief payments to survivors for whom a stimulus check could be the key to escape and the beginning of independence.
- **Reauthorize and improve the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)** by enhancing access to safety, justice, and economic stability for all survivors; increasing prevention; and reducing reliance on systems that are not helping all survivors. Creating new resources for survivors of color, maintaining protections for LGBTQIA+ survivors, and expanding tribal jurisdiction are of utmost importance.
- **Reauthorize and improve the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA)** by bolstering existing programs; increasing funding for culturally specific programs serving Communities of Color; and scaling up prevention strategies to reach every community.
- **Increase federal investments** in shelter, services, housing, culturally specific services, and legal services via programs like VAWA, FVPSA, and VOCA and domestic violence-specific funding at the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- **Pass legislation and resources that address survivors' housing needs** by strengthening protections and survivor-specific resources, particularly for immediate shelter, transitional housing, rental assistance, and flexible financial support.
- **Pass legislation that promotes financial security and economic justice for survivors,** including access to federal benefits, direct cash assistance, tax credits, childcare support, and other economic support, such as living wage jobs, safe and sick days, limitations on credit checks for survivors, anti-discrimination protections, and access to unemployment insurance.
- **Strengthen survivor-based immigration protections** by increasing access to U visas; safeguarding abused dependent spouses and children; supporting survivor self-sufficiency; and preventing detention and removal of victims.

**As an individual, you can contact your members of Congress and urge them to provide needed resources to programs and survivors, fix VOCA, and reauthorize VAWA and FVPSA.**

**Visit [NNEDV.org/TakeAction](https://www.nnedv.org/take-action) to learn more.**

**If a friend or family member tells you about abuse they have experienced, listen without judging. Tell them you are there for them, no matter what. Encourage them to seek services if it is safe for them to do so. You can find a list of resources at [NNEDV.org/Get-Help](https://www.nnedv.org/get-help).**

# SERVICES PROVIDED

Services	Provided on September 10, 2020	Offered Throughout the Year
Emergency Shelter	75%	80%
Children's Support or Advocacy	52%	79%
Court Accompaniment or Legal Advocacy	48%	90%
Support/Advocacy Related to Housing/Landlord	46%	88%
Transportation	45%	85%
Transitional or Other Housing	43%	44%
Support/Advocacy Related to Mental Health	42%	85%
Support/Advocacy Related to Public Benefits/TANF/Welfare	39%	85%
Bilingual Advocacy	35%	66%
Therapy/Counseling for Adults (by a licensed practitioner)	31%	55%
Hotel/Motel Stay	28%	70%
Support/Advocacy Related to Child Welfare/Protective Services	27%	83%
Support/Advocacy Related to Substance Abuse	24%	75%
Prevention and/or Educational Programs	22%	83%
Support/Advocacy Related to Elder Victims of Abuse	21%	83%
Support/Advocacy to Teen/Young Adult Victims of Dating Abuse	20%	84%
Support/Advocacy Related to Health Care or Health Care Systems	20%	74%
Support/Advocacy Related to Immigration	20%	78%
Financial Literacy/Budgeting	18%	69%
Therapy/Counseling for Children or Youth (by a licensed practitioner)	18%	46%
Support/Advocacy for LGBTQIA+ Victims of Abuse	17%	88%
Support/Advocacy Related to Disability Issues	16%	72%
Support/Advocacy to Victims of Trafficking	16%	79%
Job Training/Employment Assistance	15%	57%
Support/Advocacy Related to Technology Use (cyberstalking, etc.)	15%	80%
Childcare/Daycare	14%	39%
Legal Representation by an Attorney	14%	33%
Third-Party Translation/Interpretation Services	11%	65%
Safe Exchange/Visitation	6%	24%
Support/Advocacy for Active Duty or Veteran Victims in US Armed Forces	4%	59%
Alternatives to the Criminal Justice System (Transformative, Restorative Justice)	3%	22%
HIV/AIDS Information and/or Support	3%	39%
Onsite Medical Services	2%	9%
Matched Savings Programs and/or Microloans	1%	12%

# SUMMARY DATA

State or Territory	Response Rate <sup>10</sup>	Adults Served	Children Served	Total People Served	Unmet Requests for Services	Hotline Contacts Received	Total People Trained	People Served in Shelter	People Served in Transitional or Other Housing	Non-Residential People Served
AK	100%	409	200	609	25	143	46	322	113	174
AL	100%	513	218	731	76	105	144	141	161	429
AR	97%	222	118	340	28	350	79	194	42	104
AZ	78%	1298	565	1863	124	256	313	466	247	1150
CA	73%	3435	2156	5591	984	1162	1263	1156	1835	2600
CO	82%	856	421	1277	207	404	86	228	315	734
CT	100%	823	308	1131	35	239	107	230	263	638
DC	100%	511	422	933	52	138	7	64	443	426
DE	75%	129	54	183	27	9	0	41	11	131
FL	95%	1731	936	2667	72	417	1019	1002	599	1066
GA	73%	943	915	1858	431	374	52	618	561	679
GU	50%	11	18	29	0	7	0	14	11	4
HI	92%	458	381	839	90	93	13	92	189	558
IA	90%	739	256	995	158	392	104	134	230	631
ID	91%	481	189	670	77	184	61	118	163	389
IL	93%	2088	1139	3227	170	971	417	579	993	1655
IN	100%	1566	1201	2767	494	596	450	672	485	1610
KS	100%	491	333	824	64	195	119	218	175	431
KY	100%	708	334	1042	60	191	39	390	339	313
LA	100%	550	341	891	51	163	3	138	374	379
MA	100%	1313	579	1892	434	338	305	345	357	1190
MD	100%	623	236	859	248	468	30	199	132	528
ME	100%	356	121	477	31	80	2	100	123	254
MI	96%	1674	1098	2772	246	459	158	746	880	1146
MN	85%	1640	1093	2733	273	610	220	588	339	1806
MO	97%	1469	830	2299	1158	411	68	622	504	1173
MP	100%	13	14	27	0	1	0	9	18	0
MS	100%	157	97	254	24	148	74	88	84	82

<sup>10</sup>The response rate refers to the percentage of identified primary purpose local domestic violence programs in the state or territory that participated in the 2020 Domestic Violence Counts survey.

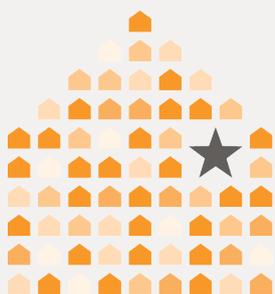
State or Territory	Response Rate <sup>11</sup>	Adults Served	Children Served	Total People Served	Unmet Requests for Services	Hotline Contacts Received	Total People Trained	People Served in Shelter	People Served in Transitional or Other Housing	Non-Residential People Served
MT	70%	255	202	457	12	107	58	135	121	201
NC	75%	812	340	1152	57	540	402	496	73	583
ND	90%	165	92	257	22	81	16	69	51	137
NE	100%	301	182	483	45	216	235	119	87	277
NH	100%	163	53	216	14	119	121	53	36	127
NJ	93%	859	325	1184	66	448	227	310	173	701
NM	74%	427	357	784	34	100	25	204	371	209
NV	82%	277	224	501	32	177	37	123	198	180
NY	100%	5383	2930	8313	1921	2110	653	2264	1744	4305
OH	100%	1864	786	2650	252	676	497	719	527	1404
OK	100%	642	306	948	58	203	249	343	117	488
OR	59%	728	395	1123	118	300	25	204	333	586
PA	90%	1744	830	2574	195	1046	439	635	798	1141
PR	74%	406	246	652	23	37	37	41	166	445
RI	100%	428	156	584	52	109	4	55	230	299
SC	100%	358	262	620	134	101	34	157	191	272
SD	55%	217	150	367	25	62	3	134	54	179
TN	91%	817	340	1157	71	259	83	323	207	627
TX	93%	3473	2477	5950	948	1563	879	1471	2241	2238
UT	100%	726	479	1205	309	359	404	276	384	545
VA	84%	898	446	1344	109	606	113	508	195	641
VI	100%	38	30	68	1	28	9	9	22	37
VT	85%	102	40	142	10	77	13	35	38	69
WA	75%	1312	994	2306	603	541	243	521	685	1100
WI	55%	748	409	1157	234	437	90	407	169	581
WV	100%	217	54	271	51	164	1	114	34	123
WY	100%	165	115	280	12	108	15	44	72	164
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>48732</b>	<b>27793</b>	<b>76525</b>	<b>11047</b>	<b>19478</b>	<b>10091</b>	<b>19283</b>	<b>19303</b>	<b>37939</b>

<sup>11</sup> The response rate refers to the percentage of identified primary purpose local domestic violence programs in the state or territory that participated in the 2020 Domestic Violence Counts survey.



Our staff implemented new protocols, obtained necessary PPE and cleaning supplies, and rose to the ever-changing challenges on top of providing individual advocacy to survivors despite their own anxieties about the pandemic. Their resilience in the face of crisis was inspiring and should be recognized and commended on a national scale.

– COLORADO ADVOCATE



**NNEDV**  
NATIONAL NETWORK  
TO END DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE

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