



Legislation Text

File #: 2021-0964, **Version:** 1

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

Department or Agency Name(s): District Attorney's Office, Probation Department, Sheriff's Office, Health Services, Human Resources - Commission on the Status of Women, Human Services

Staff Name and Phone Number: Tatiana Lopez 565-3150

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Recommended Action:

Adopt a Gold Resolution proclaiming October 2021 to be Domestic Violence Awareness Month in Sonoma County

Executive Summary:

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. The District Attorney's Office has come together with community partners to elevate the level of awareness surrounding this important issue.

Discussion:

Background: On behalf of the many public and private agencies working together to improve services, and to prevent and respond to domestic violence, six departments - the District Attorney's Office, the Sheriff's Office, Health Services, Human Services, Human Resources - Commission on the Status of Women, and the Probation Department - have come together, with the support of our community-based partners, to seek a resolution proclaiming October 2021 as Domestic Violence Awareness Month in Sonoma County.

Communities around the nation come together during October to mourn those who have died as a result of domestic violence, to celebrate those who have survived domestic violence, and to honor and connect with those who work tirelessly to put an end to domestic violence. For over two decades, purple ribbons have served as visual gestures of support for victims of domestic violence. No one is able to pinpoint the history of the purple ribbon, but it symbolizes survival, courage, honor, and dedication to ending domestic violence. It is also used to raise awareness in communities about the crime of domestic violence, and has been recognized by state legislatures.

SONOMA COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

The District Attorney has made domestic violence a top priority of her office. Senior attorneys are assigned to the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Unit and prosecute all felony domestic violence cases in the county, while specially assigned attorneys in the unit handle all misdemeanor domestic violence cases. The cases are handled according to the vertical prosecution concept, which means the same prosecutor, specially trained in the subject matter, handles each case from filing determination through trial or plea and sentencing. These prosecutors work closely on their cases with the assigned D.A. investigator, victim advocate, and law enforcement agency detectives. Victim advocates and victim restitution specialists provide victims a variety of services related to victims' participation in the criminal justice system and to assist in recovering from crimes' devastating impacts. Such services include court accompaniment, explaining the criminal justice process and

crime victim rights, and providing assistance obtaining compensation and restitution to receive reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses related to the victimization. Victim advocates attend Domestic Violence Court daily to assist victims through the often complicated process. Advocates prepare Victim Status Forms so their voice can be heard and Criminal Protective Orders to increase their safety. We have several bilingual Spanish speaking advocates to ensure understanding. The District Attorney's Office is committed to working with our law enforcement, county and community partners to hold family violence offenders accountable and to help victims heal.

Through a collaborative community response, we are celebrating the tenth anniversary, this month, of the grand opening of the Family Justice Center Sonoma County (FJCSC), where family violence victims receive comprehensive services in one location. The Sheriff's Office, Health Services, and Human Services are working with the District Attorney's Office and many other community partners and law enforcement agencies, including the YWCA Sonoma County, Verity, Council on Aging, Catholic Charities, Legal Aid of Sonoma County, as well as the Santa Rosa Police Department, to provide those services. The partners seek to empower victims of family violence to live free from violence and abuse by providing wrap-around services through a single point of access. We follow best practices in the field, track our outcomes, and build on strong interagency collaboration to protect the vulnerable, stop the violence, and restore hope. Since the relocation of Redwood Children's Center to the FJCSC, we have seen an increase in agency integration to better serve all victims of family violence. Over 13,000 clients have been served since opening the FJCSC. This year also marks the seventh year of FJCSC sending children of Domestic Violence Victims to Camp Hope, a therapeutic summer camp, which was virtual this year due to COVID-19.

SONOMA COUNTY PROBATION DEPARTMENT

The Sonoma County Probation Department has operated a specialized Domestic Violence unit since 1995. The goals of the Domestic Violence unit are to help break the cycle of family violence, assist those already affected by family violence with the healing process, and to safeguard victims and children.

On average, the Domestic Violence unit supervises approximately 420 offenders. These offenders are convicted of both misdemeanor and felony offenses. The law mandates completion of a 52-week batterers' intervention program as a condition of any grant of probation related to an act of Domestic Violence. Offenders are referred to one of four Domestic Violence intervention programs in Sonoma County, which are certified annually by the Probation Department. Offenders are required to work in group therapy on identifying triggers to violence, alternatives to violence, and communication skills. Most offenders tell their Probation Officers that they have learned a great deal from participation in these programs. Many offenders and victims have relayed that attendance has literally, "changed our lives for the better."

Using validated risk and need assessment tools, the seven Probation Officers of the Domestic Violence unit develop individualized case plans that attempt to address the core factors that brought an offender into the criminal justice system. This past fiscal year Probation staff were trained to apply the Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA); a specialized assessment tool used to identify DV offenders requiring more intensive supervision and interventions, with a goal of increasing victim safety. These Officers also act to hold offenders accountable for non-compliance with the imposed conditions of probation and established case plans. Accountability and advancement of case plan goals are achieved through meetings with offenders in an office setting, compliance checks in their homes and other community settings, and referral to appropriate service providers.

Probation Officers work closely with the victims of Domestic Violence. Victims are contacted upon an offender's initial placement on a grant of probation so that the probation supervision and future court processes can be explained to them. Ongoing contact with victims is maintained so their concerns, need for restitution, and emerging issues can be addressed as part of the supervision case plan.

The Domestic violence cases supervised by the Probation Department are all heard by a specialized Court. The progress of each offender is periodically reviewed by this Court. Assigned Probation Officers prepare reports for these Court reviews that outline an offender's compliance with the imposed terms and conditions of probation, progress in related forms of treatment, and any concerns of the victim.

SONOMA COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

During the 2019 calendar year, the Sheriff's Office, including Windsor Police Department and Sonoma Police Department, investigated 514 cases of domestic violence involving physical violence (intimate partner abuse and domestic battery). Additionally, the Sheriff's Office investigated domestic violence cases that were comprised of terrorist threats, stalking, false imprisonment, violation of domestic violence restraining orders, and assault with a deadly weapon. The total number of domestic violence calls Sheriff's Patrol responded to in 2019 was 2,722, compared to 2,600 in 2018. Thus far in 2020 we have investigated 431 domestic violence cases and responded to 1,930 calls for service. Through a partnership with the Family Justice Center Sonoma County, victims of domestic violence are referred to centrally located advocacy services helping to achieve our goal of ending family violence in the County. The Sonoma County Sheriff's Office takes the issue of domestic violence very seriously and continues to collaborate with our criminal justice partners to combat family violence.

SONOMA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

The Department of Health Services (DHS) recognizes that domestic violence is a public health issue. The physical and emotional effects of domestic violence directly impact the health and well-being of victims and their families, with the negative effects being felt long past the original injuries. Health Services remains a committed partner in working for the safety, support, and restoration of victims of domestic and family violence.

During home visits, our public health nurses, social workers, and community health workers actively screen for domestic violence and educate individuals on how to access community resources for support. Our Maternal, Child, and Adolescent Health staff provide education to community health care providers to ensure that all women are screened for intimate partner violence. Staff members also participate in the Teen Health Advocacy Coalition, which works with community partners to prevent teen dating violence and sexual assault. Our Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) provides 24-hour, seven days a week on-call forensic examination services for adult and child victims of sexual assault or abuse and works collaboratively with the Human Services Department, the District Attorney's Office, local law enforcement and community partners, such as Sutter Hospital, YWCA Sonoma County and Verity. DHS also helps support outreach efforts for the Family Justice Center Sonoma County, so that all victims of family violence are aware of the comprehensive services available to them.

SONOMA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Commission on the Status of Women

The Sonoma County Commission on the Status of Women recognizes the trauma the global pandemic has caused women and families throughout Sonoma County over the past year and a half. Women in particular have had to take on additional caregiving responsibilities and suffered loss of income and independence, sometimes leading to increased reliance on their abusers for housing and economic survival. Increased rates of abuse of women and children during this period have been documented, particularly during the shelter in place. Sonoma County Commission on the Status of Women continues to advocate for community-wide activities and agencies that work to eradicate Domestic Violence and provide services to victims in need. The effects of Domestic Violence can lead far beyond physical harm to psychological and financial trauma, homelessness and perpetuation of abuse. The Commission is resolute in raising awareness on this issue by joining global movements and continues to collaborate with and support community partners such as the Santa Rosa Violence Prevention Partnership, Verity - Sonoma County's Rape Crisis Center, and Sonoma County YWCA.

In addition, our Junior Commission's Intimate Partner Violence legacy project strives to raise awareness around the signs of dating violence and what a healthy dating relationship looks like at high schools throughout the Sonoma County.

SONOMA COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT

The Human Services Department (HSD) is committed to protecting vulnerable children and adults from all forms of abuse and violence, and to promoting maximum independence and well-being for individuals and families. Child welfare social workers, Adult Protective Services social workers, employment counselors, and eligibility workers all assess clients for experiences of domestic violence and refer to services as appropriate. If needed, social workers assist adult clients in obtaining protective orders. Children and youth reporting domestic violence at home may be removed for their own safety by child welfare social workers. HSD is also the lead agency for the Redwood Children's Center where a specialized and multi-disciplinary team interviews child and adult victims of sexual abuse or assault, preventing the need for separate and multiple interviews.

FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION COUNCIL (FVPC) AND SUBCOMMITTEES

The Family Violence Prevention Council (FVPC) consists of over thirty members representing an array of agencies, departments and organizations in Sonoma County. The FVPC's mission is to develop, promote, and enhance creative prevention and effective intervention initiatives to reduce the amount of family violence in Sonoma County. The FVPC provides an ongoing forum for collaboration among victim service providers, batterers' treatment providers, the courts, criminal justice partners, and civil legal services. The Council is co-chaired by the Sonoma County Superior Court and the District Attorney. The Council supports training, educational and outreach opportunities to raise awareness in the field and in the public on the importance of breaking the cycle of violence. The Council and its subcommittees, reviews, discusses and updates law enforcement protocols and policies and court and legal practices, as necessary, to ensure consistency in response to incidents of family violence throughout our County.

YWCA SONOMA COUNTY

"Ending domestic violence in Sonoma County through education, awareness and empowerment."

Over the course of the COVID pandemic, YWCA has sustained our singular and critical role in supporting families suffering from the impact of domestic violence. Calls to YWCA's 24/7 Domestic Violence Crisis Hotline (546-1234) are on the rise. Equally of note is the increased complexity and acuity of the situations callers are sharing with our team. Safety planning and strategies to ensure relief are at the forefront of every call we

receive. YWCA’s vital role in our community has never been more evident. Established in the mid-1970s, YWCA’s 24/7 Crisis Hotline, the only one in Sonoma County, is still the most direct path to support for families in need.

This one thing we do know, now more than ever our community will need YWCA’s trauma informed care, advocacy, compassion and resources as we continue on in a pandemic impacted world.

Plans for YWCA’s annual Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM) campaign are in full swing. In addition to being recognized with the County’s Gold Resolution, YWCA plans to appear virtually to receive Proclamations honoring our work from various Sonoma County towns and cities. New this year is the “Y I Run” - “FUN RUN/WALK” at Spring Lake slated for the morning of Saturday, October 23rd. Participants will register on our website and encourage donations toward their personal or team based fundraising goal. Sponsors for this event include The County of Sonoma Board of Supervisors, Heart & Sole Sports and Bright Ideas Promotional Marketing. Stay tuned to ywcasc.org for the DVAM calendar and more details on this new event.

Prior Board Actions:

Since 1982, the Board of Supervisors has proclaimed October to be Domestic Violence Awareness Month. The District Attorney’s Office has joined with the Probation Department, the Sheriff’s Office, Health Services, Human Services and Human Resources’ Commission on the Status of Women, with support from our community-based partners in requesting this proclamation. All partners join in the request for recognition of Sonoma County’s efforts to prevent and respond to domestic violence.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY 21-22 Adopted	FY22-23 Projected	FY 23-24 Projected
Budgeted Expenses			
Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures			
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal			
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
Contingencies			
Total Sources			

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

No fiscal impact.

Staffing Impacts:			
Position Title (Payroll Classification)	Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step)	Additions (Number)	Deletions (Number)

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

No staffing impact.

Attachments:

Resolution

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:

None