

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 23, 2020

Assistant Secretary Lynn Johnson
Administration for Children and Families
Department of Health and Human Services
330 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Acting-Director Laura Rogers
Office on Violence Against Women
Department of Justice
145 N Street, NE, Ste. 10W.121
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Assistant Secretary Johnson and Acting-Director Rogers:

We write to express our concern for the wellbeing of families who face an increased risk of domestic violence during the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). We also ask that the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) ensure that the organizations that help victims and survivors of domestic violence have the flexibility, resources, and information needed to continue to provide these critical services during the pandemic.

In recent weeks, states and cities across the country have taken a variety of steps to mitigate the spread of the virus, including closing schools, limiting access to public spaces and restaurants, and instructing people to shelter in place. Many people are now working from home, while others have been required to take unpaid leave or have lost their jobs.

An unintended but foreseeable consequence of these drastic measures will be increased stress at home, which in turn creates a greater risk for domestic violence. According to one recent article, emergency situations have “historically led to increased reports of domestic abuse” to the National Domestic Violence Hotline.¹ In addition, domestic violence service providers expect an increase in the need for emergency childcare and domestic violence shelters, as well as for supplies to keep centers and program sites safe and secure.

Many of these programs are administered by your offices and funded through grants authorized by the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act and the Violence Against Women Act. It is critical that your agencies ensure that victims and survivors of domestic violence continue to have access to these vital services. Accordingly, we request answers to the following questions, as well as a telephonic briefing with members of our staff, regarding actions ACF and OVW are taking no later than March 31, 2020:

1. Have the domestic violence programs that ACF and OVW administer seen an increase in need over the past 60 days, as a result of the COVID-19 mitigation efforts in place at the

¹ Rachel Snyder, *Trapped at Home: Coronavirus Could be Disastrous for Domestic Violence Victims*, Los Angeles Times, Mar. 16, 2020. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2020-03-16/social-distancing-coronavirus-domestic-violence>

local, state, and federal level? If so, please provide detail, to the extent possible, broken down by state or territory.

2. How have the domestic violence programs administered by your offices been strained as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What steps have ACF and OVW taken to prepare for a potential rise in the need for domestic violence programs or services?
4. What will ACF and OVW do to provide organizations an opportunity to request additional financial support to respond to an increased demand for services?
5. What steps has ACF and OVW taken to ensure that survivors continue to have to access to judicial proceedings, including the opportunity to seek a protective order?
6. What steps will ACF and OVW take to provide greater flexibility for service providers who may be required to alter their programs without risking their eligibility for funding?
7. If programs have to close or suspend services due to COVID-19, will ACF and OVW offer grantees flexibility to continue to support the programs' employees?
8. What information or resources have you made available to domestic violence organizations, particularly with regard to ensuring the safety of front line employees?
9. Have ACF and OVW provided guidance about how organizations should alter their operations in order to maintain services while providing for the safety of staff, including remote or mobile operations?
10. What additional guidance or resources are ACF and OVW providing domestic violence organizations that serve American Indians / Alaska Natives, rural, and underserved communities?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We urge you to take immediate action to prepare for a potential increase in incidents of domestic violence and look forward to your prompt response.


Sincerely,


Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator


Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator


Bernard Sanders
United States Senator


Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Maize K. Hirono
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Jon Tester
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator




Sherrod Brown
United States Senator




Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator




Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Robert Menendez
United States Senator


Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator


Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator


Mark R. Warner
United States Senator


Cory A. Booker
United States Senator


Ron Wyden
United States Senator


Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator