



Policy Partnership for Communities of Color

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Subject: Policy Recommendations for the Obama-Biden Transition Team

The Policy Partnership for Communities of Color works to build the grassroots political power of Communities of Color working to end violence against women. The mission of the Policy Partnership is to address federal and international policy that impacts on violence against women, such that it is inclusive of the experiences of Communities of Color and provides the tools and resources for our communities to effectively work towards the elimination of violence against women.

The Policy Partnership is collectively chaired by the: ***Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC), National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence (Alianza), the Asian Pacific Islander Women and Family Safety Center (APIWFSC) and the National Organization of Sisters of Color Ending Sexual Assault (SCESA)***. We are committed to working with the Obama-Biden Administration in its efforts to provide leadership in formulating policies and processes needed to address services while undertaking comprehensive efforts to eliminate the violence perpetrated against women and girls.

Overview

Violence against women is a significant social and public health crisis across the country that affects all people regardless of age, race or socioeconomic status. However, it is most often silenced in Communities of Color. Over the last 30 years we have made tremendous strides in addressing violence against women yet, many criminal justice and victim services programs are unable to adequately respond to Women of Color who are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking and stalking.

Women of Color, who are from traditionally marginalized communities, still lack services by providers who reflect their cultural community available in their language. ***The complexities of addressing violence against women within cultural communities are vast and cannot be dealt with merely by cultural competency trainings or translating brochures.*** The lives of Women of Color intersect with other issues including health care, immigration, disability and economics. Further, when the needs of Communities of Color are solely addressed under provisions for all underserved populations, it ignores the fact that People of Color can also be disabled, elderly, poor or live in rural communities.

Given the growing diversity in this country, there needs to be clear and consistent support for resources to address the cultural and linguistic needs of Communities of Color. We must



provide services, outreach and prevention strategies that are culturally and linguistically appropriate, crafted, carried out by service providers from within various Communities of Color, and accessible to women in their own communities. There must be opportunity and support for the leadership of Communities of Color advocates and organizations to assume responsibility for developing or enhancing the appropriate services that are culturally relevant for their community.

We know given the past work and leadership shown by President Elect Obama and Vice-President Elect Biden on VAWA 2005, that this new Administration understands that it is ***a fundamental human right that all people live their lives free of violence.***

Under this Partnership, we submit the following critical recommendations as strategies for ensuring that all victims of sexual and domestic violence, dating violence, trafficking and stalking have full access to services:

Enhance Access to Resources and Services

- **Ensure that Communities of Color organizations are able to have fair access to all federal resources that address violence against women** such that they may develop culturally and linguistically specific intervention, prevention, community engagement, public education and awareness efforts focused on their communities. Resources should specifically be directed to organizations by and for Communities of Color to ensure expertise in developing successful strategies. Additionally, particular attention should be given to the lack of equitable funding for Community of Color organizations that address human trafficking.
- **Recognize and acknowledge that Communities of Color are a vulnerable population and “at risk” for higher incidents of violence against women and support funding geared specifically for this population.** This country has a long history of creating funding that responds to the needs of “at risk” or “vulnerable” populations. Recognizing the unique challenges faced by Communities of Color because of cultural and linguistic barriers, Congress created funding titled “culturally and linguistic” to specifically address these needs. In many States, Communities of Color programs and organizations still receive little or no funding from formula grant programs that address violence against women. It is therefore imperative to provide clear policies and directives to all States, that culturally and linguistically specific resources should be directed towards Communities of Color programs and organizations.
- **Ensure that service providers, courts and law enforcement facilities are equipped with trained bicultural and bilingual interpreters and translators.** Issue guidance and provide resources to ensure full compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, regarding Limited-English Proficient (LEP). Support efforts to ensure that interpreters and translators receive training on violence against women.
- **Increase access to free legal representation and assistance for victims to address a wide range of legal needs in addressing violence against women (e.g. family law issues, housing, employment, immigration issues, criminal law, and public benefits).** Additionally, collaborate with national experts to explore ways for victims to access free legal representation that does not solely rely on an overburdened Legal Services Corporation.



Support efforts to ensure that Legal Services Corporation attorneys receive training on domestic violence, sexual assault and trafficking.

- **Support efforts to increase the leadership of Communities of Color addressing domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking.** Provide resources and opportunities that allow for meaningful inclusion of survivors, advocates, and organizations that are from Communities of Color and have a history addressing domestic violence, sexual assault, or trafficking in policy decisions, processes and advisory committees at the federal level. Support processes that seek to increase the number of attorneys and healthcare professionals from Communities of Color addressing violence against women.
- **Work closely with States to ensure that Federal mandates promote and protect victim rights and access to services.** Close the gap that allows States to redefine federal statutes such that it changes Congressional intent. Provide clear guidelines that allow federal offices the flexibility to employ strategies needed to effectively monitor the implementation of formula grant programs to ensure fulfillment of statutory requirements and Congressional intent. For example, the Office on Violence against Women should have the authority to implement procedures that will allow the Office to effectively monitor the state planning and implementation process (including Requests For Proposals and Budgets) related to the STOP (Services, Training Officers and Prosecution) grant program to ensure that statutory requirements are fully carried out. Further, this will allow for institutional policy decisions and provision of relevant technical assistance based on identified needs.

Immigration

- **Ensure access to services and safety regardless of immigration status for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and trafficking.** Immigrant survivors should have access to services without fear of deportation from law enforcement officials or civil and criminal court systems. Social service providers such as domestic violence shelters and sexual assault service centers should not be penalized for providing services to undocumented survivors. This requires enhanced policies to prevent discrimination based on language or immigration status and enable broader access to services and resources.
- **Support efforts to ensure access and provide an avenue to the U visa for victims of sexual assault that is not reliant on assisting in the investigation or prosecution of the perpetrator.** The U visa provides critical relief for immigrant victims of crime – however, sexual assault is unlike any other crime. We know that many sexual assault survivors do not report the assault for a variety of reasons – in fact because of the significant level of shame and trauma many tell no one about the abuse and often suffer in silence. Any process or service that relies solely on a victims' report to law enforcement or assisting in the adjudication of the perpetrator makes the process ineffective and inaccessible to many survivors of sexual assault. Further, any process that relies on government officials to certify that the victim is helping with the case can create a dynamic whereby the victim is once again forced to act based on a power differential and therefore re-traumatized.
- **Hold a national meeting with violence against women advocates, especially advocates from Communities of Color organizations, and immigration officials** to address the unintended consequences of factory raids that have led significant numbers of immigrant women who are survivors of violence to suffer in silence for fear of deportation. Provide clear



guidelines and a process that does not unfairly subject farm workers and factory workers that are immigrants to raids and detention stays that take away their basic human rights and separate children from their parents.

Engaging Youth and Men

- **Support efforts to engage youth and men of color in ending violence against women**
Enhance outreach efforts to engage youth and men of color in ending violence against women through primary prevention efforts, community engagement and public awareness activities. Enhance efforts to support responsible fatherhood programs in developing long-term strategies to combat violence against women. Further, create resources to strengthen community collaborations and prevention models driven by Communities of Color that are aimed at long-term prevention and elimination of violence against women.
- **Support efforts to integrate prevention strategies for pre-school and school-aged boys and girls in the school systems** (including HeadStart and Upward Bound programs) as well as after schools programs and other community youth programs.
- **Enhance efforts to focus on developing strategies to assist reentry efforts for men returning to communities after a period of incarceration particularly as they relate to issues of family violence.**

Inter- Agency Coordination and White House Leadership

- **Provide a process for greater collaboration across federal agencies to respond to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking.** The Administration should strengthen cross agency efforts to holistically address violence against women and enhance both criminal justice and non-criminal justice responses. As part of this collaborative effort, these departments should ensure that staff charged with overseeing projects, initiatives, or funding streams related to these issues are trained, diverse and have sufficient knowledge of the dynamics related to violence against women issues. Further, these offices should work collaboratively across federal agencies to ensure a wider range of enhanced culturally and linguistically specific intervention and prevention options for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking and stalking exist, including but not limited to health, housing, economic sustainability, and legal services.
- **Support the creation of a White House Liaison on Violence Against Women.** This liaison would promote a national focus on ending violence against women, convene bi-annual meetings with representatives from all federal agencies, put forth federal policies and work with the violence against women field, *in particular national Communities of Color leaders working to end this violence.*

Enhanced Economic Stability and Housing Options

- **Provide polices that allow tenants who are survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking to make structural changes and/or changes to their living situation to address their safety needs.** Also, include sexual assault as a crime in the same category as domestic violence that would allow a tenant of public and subsidized housing to be given support and priority to move without losing their housing subsidies.



- **Provide a system for violence against women advocates to be involved in processes and work collaboratively with HUD** to address the safety of women and children when crafting urban development policy and programming decisions.

Provide guidance to HUD regarding the unintended consequences of the shift in resources to the chronically homeless and the Housing First Model. While we appreciate the efforts of HUD to address the needs of the most vulnerable populations, the HUD definition of chronically homeless focuses only on providing housing to single adults without children. This shift in resources leaves out victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking and their children. Additionally, it ignores the need for wrap-around services that must be connected to housing to ensure long-term sustainability. The Administration should encourage HUD to work with victim services, particularly those that represent Communities of Color, to ensure that HUD priorities meet the needs of all vulnerable populations.

Enhance the economic stability of intervention and prevention programs through full funding for the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in addition to reauthorization and full funding for the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA).

Enhance the economic safety net for women who are placed at greater risk because of their victimization and ensure appropriate services to address the multiple economic barriers they face through enhanced job training, unemployment assistance, childcare resources, TANF, housing assistance, and access to medical care.

- **Support the development of Responsible Fatherhood Programs that include a focus on ensuring the economic sufficiency of both parents.** Ensuring safe and healthy homes for children begins with the safety of mothers. The development of Responsible Fatherhood Programs that help fathers develop safe parenting and relationship skills, enhance job training skills and education meet a critical need for Communities of Color. However, in order to meet the goal of providing safe homes for children, the needs of their mothers must not be neglected. The Administration should provide guidance to ensure that Fatherhood initiatives are coupled with the efforts of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking service providers to ensure that these programs address the physical and economic safety of the entire family.

Research

- **Ensure that research is done to address violence against women in Communities of Color.** This research should be conducted by researchers from Communities of Color and use methods that are relevant for the specific cultural community.

Children

- **Develop a national strategy to address the over reporting of Parents of Color to Child Protective Services (CPS).** Children of Color are over-represented in the CPS system in part because of prejudices and lack of understanding and appreciation of cultural communities. While we understand that, there are many cases of abuse that go unreported – we would argue that it is because of lack of training on what truly constitutes abuse.



Professionals that are mandated reporters (including Pediatricians) often report on biases based on racist views of Communities of Color while missing clear warning signs of actual abuse in all families. All professionals that are mandated reporters should be trained on how to appropriately assess for abuse especially as it relates to Communities of Color such that it is not devaluing of their cultural perspectives.