



TESTIMONY

Steven Banks, Commissioner
Human Resources Administration/Department of Social Services

*Joint Hearing of the New York City Council
Women's Issues, General Welfare, and Courts and Legal Services Committees*

Good afternoon Chairpersons of the Women's Issues, General Welfare, and Courts and Legal Services Committees. I am Steven Banks, Commissioner of the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA). Thank you for this opportunity to discuss our efforts to provide assistance and support for survivors of domestic violence.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. It serves as an opportunity to remember and acknowledge that domestic violence affects every New Yorker. During this month we are reminded that no one is immune to the consequences of abuse, regardless of socio-economic status, race, gender or sexual orientation.

Domestic violence, or intimate partner violence, is a pattern of coercive behaviors aimed at controlling one's intimate partner, which over time leaves a person powerless, fearful, and ashamed. It is not only characterized by hitting, shoving, and punching, but also by psychological and financial abuse that results in the destruction of a person's sense of self-worth, security and safety. One in three women and one in ten men experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime.

HRA has a long history of providing services to domestic violence survivors through our Office of Domestic Violence (ODV). The largest domestic violence services system in the nation, ODV oversees an extensive network of domestic violence services, which include shelters, community-based services, and primary prevention programs. ODV's staff is committed to providing a broad array of services to survivors of domestic violence.

What follows is a snapshot of the array of services offered through Office of Domestic Violence in the past fiscal year:

- 44,000 families sought services related to domestic violence they were experiencing;
- 3,877 families entered a domestic violence shelter;
- 7,100 families in NYC's Department of Homeless Services intake centers were assessed for domestic violence by HRA's NoVA program;
- 9,600 public assistance clients in Job Centers were assessed for domestic violence by Domestic Violence Liaisons;
- 4,000 domestic violence survivors received legal services, community-based advocacy and counseling;
- 10,700 students participated in workshops and received counseling through Teen RAPP, the relationship violence prevention program; and
- 8,500 NYC Housing Authority residents received domestic violence education, intervention, and aftercare services.

Our specific services are as follows:

Emergency and Transitional Shelter Services

The provision of shelter services for survivors of domestic violence is mandated under the New York State Social Services Law and is in accordance with the State Office of Family and Children's Services and regulations regarding emergency shelter, services and care for survivors of domestic violence.

The HRA Domestic Violence shelter system is the largest domestic violence shelter system in the country. It includes 44 confidential emergency shelter facilities throughout all five boroughs of New York City with a total bed capacity of 2,228 beds, which can accommodate approximately 800 families and seven Transitional Housing Tier II shelters, which have 243 units. In FY 2014, the HRA domestic violence system served 11,105 individuals, which included 3,877 adults, 6,784 children and 444 singles.

Emergency domestic violence shelters provide temporary housing and supportive services for up to 180 days in a safe environment for survivors of domestic violence and their families. This 180-day time limit is set forth in a New York State regulation. The HRA Office of Domestic Violence is responsible for the administrative and fiscal oversight of 43 private emergency residential programs and the direct operation of the largest emergency domestic violence shelter facility with 176 beds.

Emergency shelter services are designed to stabilize clients in a safe environment. Programs are developed to work with families to manage the crisis and trauma of domestic violence, strengthen coping skills, and enhance client self-sufficiency. Required services include individual counseling, advocacy, psycho-educational groups and trauma-focused interventions that address the dynamics of domestic violence and particularly the impact on parenting. All shelter programs are required to provide childcare services, and assist clients with housing, benefit entitlement assistance, financial development services and workforce development and employment readiness services to maximize self-sufficiency.

DV shelter programs serve all members of the family, including male-headed households, with a particular emphasis on children to ensure the opportunity for healing and to break the cycle of violence. Several residential programs provide specialized services, including mental health, substance use treatment and expressive therapies such as art therapy, play therapy for children, movement and stress reduction programs. Several shelter provider agencies also specialize in serving the needs of particular populations, including persons with disabilities, Orthodox Jews, Asians and Latinas.

HRA also has seven Transitional Housing Tier II shelters. These programs have a total of 243 units for families. DV Tier II shelters are transitional residential domestic violence programs regulated by the State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) that provide an extension of shelter services for families in the emergency DV shelter system in need of continued support and ongoing services to obtain safe permanent housing and re-integrate into communities. Services are aimed at preparing families for reintegration by strengthening client support systems and life skills to maximize self-sufficiency. Particular emphasis is

placed on training and work force preparation, advocacy and referral services for special needs, and aftercare services.

Previously, after 180 days in an emergency shelter, families were either able to leave shelter with available continuing non-residential support services, move to HRA Transitional Tier II housing or, if they still needed to be in a shelter, obtain shelter from the Department of Homeless Services.

While families leaving an HRA DV shelter are eligible for placement in a DHS shelter, the process of moving between the two systems is not as seamless as it should be. Working together, HRA and the Department Homeless Services (DHS) are implementing a system to manage the transition of families from the HRA system to the DHS system without the need for families to be evaluated for shelter eligibility a second time at PATH since HRA has already determined these families to be in need of shelter. However, using the new LINC program, instead of sending families from HRA shelters to DHS shelters, we are working to move these families with children into a permanent home.

Implemented in September, the LINC rental assistance program, short for Living in Communities, helps families move from temporary, emergency shelter back to the community as quickly as possible by paying a portion of their rent for up to five years, if they continue to qualify. The program is targeted for families who have spent the longest time in shelter. There are three LINC programs, with one, LINC III, specifically designated for domestic violence survivors who have been in the HRA shelters for the longest periods to avoid having to transfer families from the HRA system to the DHS system when the 180-day regulatory time limit is reached. Almost half of the total LINC rental assistance program this year, 1,900 slots out of almost 4,000, is set aside for DV families.

LINC III is designated for survivors on public assistance, who make up approximately 85% of domestic violence survivors in our HRA shelters. Those who are working can qualify for the other LINC programs as we proceed with the implementation of this new rental assistance initiative. So survivors can end up with more than just the 1,900 slots in LINC III.

In addition to the LINC rental assistance program, as we have reported previously to the Council in testimony regarding HRA's reform initiatives, HRA, DHS and the New York City Housing Authority have worked together to streamline the NYCHA application process for families in the HRA and DHS shelters who HRA's No Violence Again (NoVA) staff has certified as survivors of domestic violence. Previously, even though HRA had determined that such families were survivors, they were required to obtain duplicative additional documentation to obtain the N1 NYCHA domestic violence priority. As a result, very few families in the HRA and DHS shelters were able to receive the N1 NYCHA priority. This process has now been reformed so that HRA's certification is sufficient.

HRA, DHS and NYCHA have identified the families in the HRA and DHS shelters who HRA has certified as domestic violence survivors and who have pending NYCHA applications. These families are being designated as N1 priorities. Based on apartment availability for the family sizes, NYCHA projects that between now and December 31, 2014, between 50 and

100 of these families will be able to move from HRA and DHS shelters to NYCHA apartments with the N1 priority. Thereafter, this new priority process for certified survivors of domestic violence in HRA and DHS shelters will continue on an ongoing basis, with the number of families moving into NYCHA apartments with the N1 priority each year dependent on available apartments.

Project No Violence Again (NoVA)

Project NoVA, established in 1991, addresses the needs of domestic violence survivors seeking emergency housing from the Department of Homeless Services. NoVA is staffed by MSW social workers who provide assessment, crisis counseling, information and referrals, and placement of eligible domestic violence clients into emergency DV shelters.

The NoVA Unit is located at the DHS PATH Family Intake Center and at the DHS Adult Intake Center at Bellevue Medical Center where clients are assessed to determine DV eligibility and risk.

As part of our reform initiatives, DHS and HRA are working together to revamp the space in which HRA NoVA staff interview families at PATH so that adults can be interviewed without having to answer questions about domestic violence in front of their children. In FY 2014, Project NoVA assessed more than 7,100 families at the DHS PATH Center, and more than 500 adult couples at the DHS Adult Intake Center.

Domestic Violence Liaison Unit (DVLU)

The Domestic Violence Liaison Unit (DVLU) is a service mandated by the Family Violence Option Act (FVO), which is intended to protect survivors of domestic violence who could be further endangered through compliance with public assistance requirements, particularly employment and child support.

Liaisons serve all HRA FIA Job Centers and determine eligibility for waivers from work and other requirements when that is necessary to protect clients.

In FY 2014 the DVL Unit assessed more than 9,600 clients for safety and DV service needs and issued over 8,600 waivers.

As we have testified previously, HRA has reformed the process for obtaining DV waivers by modifying the former “partial waiver” system that put survivors at risk, while still permitting families who are able to participate in employment programs to do so as long as their safety is protected.

Anti-Domestic Violence Eligibility Needs Team (ADVENT)

ADVENT is a specialized case management unit for clients in emergency DV shelters who are on cash assistance or receiving public assistance benefits. The ADVENT Program was

developed as an extension of the Domestic Violence Liaison Unit to address the specific needs of DV clients in shelter.

In FY 2014, ADVENT provided specialized case management and work engagement services to an average of 1,100 DV clients in shelter each month.

Alternative to Shelter Program (ATS)

The **Alternative to Shelter Program** offers domestic violence survivors and their children the option of remaining safely in their home or in the community instead of moving into a domestic violence shelter. The program provides clients with a personal electronic response alarm system linked to local police precincts enabling them to remain safely in their homes. Clients are also offered ongoing case management services which include: crisis counseling and safety planning, support, advocacy and referral and information services. ATS has an active caseload of over 200 clients per month.

Domestic Violence Intervention and Education Program (DVIEP)

The Domestic Violence Intervention and Education Program (DVIEP) is a contracted program transferred from NYCHA to HRA in 2009. The program is based in nine NYCHA police service areas where case managers work closely with DV Police Officers to respond to domestic violence incident reports and provide crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for DV survivors in NYCHA housing. A goal of the program is to encourage clients to accept DV services to reduce the level of risk to clients and increase utilization of services available to clients in NYCHA.

In FY 2014, DVIEP engaged more than 7,900 clients in domestic violence services.

Domestic Violence Aftercare Program (DVAP)

The Domestic Violence Aftercare Program (DVAP) provides intensive case management and support services to DV survivors living in New York City Housing Authority developments who are approved for an emergency housing transfer to transition to a safer apartment. DVAP is staffed with case managers and MSW social workers who provide NYCHA DV clients with home-based assessments, case management, referral and information, advocacy, safety planning, and relocation assistance. Clients are referred to DVAP upon approval of their applications for a NYCHA emergency DV transfer.

In FY 2014, DVAP provided case management services to over 600 NYCHA emergency transfer clients.

Non-Residential Domestic Violence Programs

Community based non-residential services for survivors of domestic violence have proven to be an effective method of addressing the needs of some survivors of domestic violence and their children, particularly survivors who are seeking supportive services, but do not require or

would not consider entering an emergency shelter program. In some cases, such non-residential services may alleviate a need for domestic violence residential services. In other cases, non-residential services offer community-based support for families who have left domestic violence shelter.

Non-residential domestic violence services are mandated by New York State and regulated through the State Office of Children and Families Services. The regulations state that the local social services agency, in this case the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA), must provide the following “core” services:

- **A Telephone Hotline.**
- **Information and Referrals** to specialized counseling and medical services and whatever else a client may need.
- **Advocacy**, such as providing liaison services or intervening with community programs on behalf of survivors of domestic violence.
- **Counseling**, including individual or group, for children and adults.
- **Community Education and Outreach**, that educates the community on the need for and benefits of domestic violence services, as well as educating the personnel of schools, police agencies, courts and hospitals.
- **Legal Services**, including orders of protection, child custody, child support, immigration issues and divorce.

HRA contracts with community based organizations to offer 15 programs that provide the core services listed above in all five boroughs. Two providers offer services to special populations: LGBTQ and survivors of domestic violence with disabilities. Services are offered in a range of languages, including Spanish, Russian, Hindi, Bengali, Urdu, Gurajati, Punjabi, Cantonese, Mandarin, Fukienese, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, Serbo-Croatian, Tamil, Sindhi, French, Portuguese, Arabic, Creole, Italian, and Romanian.

In FY 2014, non-residential providers assisted an average of 3,000 families each month, and offered legal services to an average of 1,000 per month.

Domestic Violence Hotline

The NYC Domestic Violence Hotline was created in 1994 and receives calls from survivors of domestic violence seeking shelter, counseling, information and referrals to domestic violence services. The hotline is operated by Safe Horizon, a private not-for-profit social service agency and DV service provider. The DV hotline operates 24 hours per day 7 days per week. Hotline staff is able to link callers to available space in the 44 HRA DV emergency shelters.

In FY 2014, the DV hotline received more than 8,000 calls per month. This volume has been consistent over several years.

Teen Relationship Abuse Prevention Program (RAPP)

The Teen Relationship Abuse Prevention Program, a school-based program, is one of the most extensive domestic violence prevention programs in New York City, and is critical to ending relationship abuse among young people. Through a comprehensive curriculum, students learn to recognize and change destructive patterns of behavior before they are transferred to adult relationships. Since 1999, HRA's innovative RAPP Program has helped teens attending public high schools and middle schools develop healthier relationships. RAPP serves 54 high schools and 8 middle schools. The RAPP providers are: the Church Avenue Merchants Block Association (CAMBA), Center Against Domestic Violence, and STEPs to End Family Violence.

The summer program is offered in a work setting with emphasis placed on work place etiquette and responsibility, and participants receive a salary. During the summer of 2014, approximately 150 students participated.

In FY 2014, more than 7,400 students received RAPP intervention services and counseling, and more than 3,300 completed the three session curriculum. Since 2005, RAPP has reached more than 60,000 students.

Financial Services

HRA has successfully embedded financial development services throughout the domestic violence continuum of care with our partners The Financial Clinic and The Department of Consumer Affairs. These services assist clients in shelter and in the community improve their financial security in areas such as increasing assets, improving credit, reducing debt, and accessing free tax services and benefits such as Earned Income Tax Credit.

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In closing, while our efforts to address domestic violence continue to be comprehensive, there is much work to be done to curtail the ravaging effects of domestic violence in our city.