

Committee on the Judiciary
Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants: Budget Oversight Hearing, June 11, 2021
Testimony of Bridgette Stumpf, NVRDC Executive Director

Thank you Chairperson Allen, other Committee members, and staff. My name is Bridgette Stumpf and I am testifying on behalf of Network for Victim Recovery of DC (NVRDC), as Executive Director. Our organization aims to create survivor-defined justice through a variety of advocacy and legal services. Since inception, we have supported over 5,000 individuals affected by violence. We are committed to ensuring that the systems available to survivors are responsive to their diverse needs and are appropriately resourced.¹

In FY20, NVRDC supported 753 new clients. The advocacy team served 462 individuals (354 of whom accessed a medical forensic exam, referred to as a SANE exam) and our legal program handled 400 active matters. Given the compounding effects that COVID-19 has had on survivors, it is important to note we started this current fiscal year with 38% (154) of the total amount of legal cases that we would typically expect to see throughout an entire year. Additionally, NVRDC's Victim Legal Network of DC (VLNDC)² received 396 calls for service, an 18% increase over the prior year. This is a reflection of the increased capacity tax on providers responding to the residual effects of the pandemic.

Despite the increase in services offered over the last three years, NVRDC's FY20 OVSJG awards were only 1% (\$21,000) increased from our FY17 funding. In FY21, NVRDC received a \$143,000 reduction in total funding from OVSJG to provide core services and coordinate the District's Collaborative Training and Response to Older Victims (DC TROV).

For the past few years, you have heard the same sentiment from me in every budget hearing. We reiterate the value of having government funding agencies use policies that require living wage pay in nonprofits, provide transparent funding data regarding average wages of grantee staff, and reporting on use of employee v. contractors with details on benefits provided. NVRDC continues to feel there is opacity regarding the development of funding priorities and communication-flow from OVSJG to help providers plan for flat funding or reductions year-over-year—particularly when overall agency budgets are stabilized or even increased. This not only affects our ability to meet clients' needs, but also impacts how we are able to support our employees in ways that are consistent with our values. For example, we would ask OVSJG to support provider practices that

¹ After completing a three-year long strategic planning process, [NVRDC launched a theory of change](#) that details how our core values inform our work and the pathways we use to drive impact in our community. In addition to the empowerment pathway that defines our direct services, we are committed to educating public leaders and funders on their roles in supporting a strong safety net for survivors. This requires us to invest in system transformation by advocating for more equitable, transparent, and appropriately resourced responses to violence. Internally, we embarked on several policy and practice changes that increase how we support sustainable passion in our staff and live our core value of equity and allyship. Over the next year, we will be launching a series of conversations about these core values and inviting stakeholders to participate in sharing how organizations strengthen staff engagement and encourage larger community investments that sustain nonprofit work. We invite OVSJG not only to participate but also to consider how they might improve their own operations and policies in aligning with those that drive living wage practices, fair benefits, and transparency in decisions that are driving investment priorities within this office. We are responsible for driving macro-level changes that improve the larger nonprofit sector's sustainability, reduce turnover, and ultimately improve our clients' experiences.

² We appreciate OVSJG's support of this project and strongly support the ongoing investment in the Access to Justice Initiative.

aim to promote sustainable passion, more diverse hiring and recruitment, innovations in services, and sustainable infrastructure.

While we are encouraged by the current projection that would provide an overall 47% increase in OVSJG’s FY22 budget, we would appreciate a better understanding of what informed these allocations and what oversight ensures accountability over the intended investments.³ When NVRDC is planning program expansion, service enhancements, and critical needs for staff investments to sustain them in the work, we use various methods of program evaluation, client and staff feedback processes, and gap assessments that include resource accounting analysis. We would recommend that OVSJG consider these practices to inform budget investment amounts that they advocate for and utilize.

For example, the \$1.7 million is not enough to sustain the Sexual Assault Victims' Rights Amendment Act of 2019 (SAVRAA) expansion, as intended. NVRDC has continued to work with Resolution Economics to produce a forensic accounting analysis of costs required to responsibly implement SAVRAA. Our estimates predict that roughly 900 adult survivors will access advocacy services each year through this expansion. This would be an estimated 154% increase in the number of clients NVRDC supported through the SANE program last year.

We expect this to cause total advocacy costs to increase to \$2,407,779 (NVRDC’s cost per client,⁴ which is \$2,675.31⁵ x 900 clients a year). This does not include additional resource needs of agencies offering youth survivors acute care and follow-up vertical advocacy, emergency housing services offered by DC SAFE, or increases in staffing or operations for dispatch needs offered by the DC Victim Hotline, or additional medical forensic services provided by DCFNE. This is why we are concerned that \$1.7 million will fail to achieve SAVRAA’s intended purpose.

For FY21, OVSJG funded the following to promote the SAVRAA implementation:⁶

Org	Program	Abstract	Amount
DCRCC	SAVRAA Acute Adult Advocacy Response	Provide 24/7 in-person, and virtually accessible, trauma informed, culturally competent, supportive services to 500 survivors of sexual a violence.	\$412,460
Elisabeth Olds	SAVRAA Independent Consultant	Provide services to effectuate and evaluate implementation of SAVRAA 2019.	\$82,264
Safe Shores	SAVRAA Teen Advocacy Program	Provide crisis/continuity services for 50 teen, DC sex assault survivors.	\$441,762
NVRDC	Expanding Access to Advocacy for Sexual Assault Survivors	Increase capacity to provide advocacy to survivors of sexual assault in DC with in-person services in hospital & non-hospital settings	\$436,863

³ Likewise, it is common practice during budget advocacy to gather individual organizations’ funding gaps and to use that data to inform the larger community budget ask.

⁴ Which include the provision of acute response and vertical advocacy.

⁵ OVSJG is currently funding approximately 70% of our total advocacy cost (\$1,738,952), with hospital based services funded by OVSJG at \$776,126.12, community-based services at \$419,550.28, and youth-specific services at \$28,663.19.

⁶ The total \$1,373,349 investment from FY21 does not reflect total 12-month cycles. For example, given the timing of the RFA and implementation, NVRDC’s staffing plan was only for a 9-month period (true yearly costs would have been \$580,000).

The \$1.7 million allocated for SAVRAA for FY22 appears to be a near replication of investments from this year. Furthermore, the current under-resourcing⁷ of the adult community response is evident when cross-referenced with the cost for the youth response, which currently receives \$441,000 to support 50 survivors (versus the current \$848,000 to cover the increase in 150 to 300 adult cases). Bottom line, these cost analyses are important to ensure we are not merely just replicating this current year's approved expenses but rather thoughtfully analyzing projections and the real need to ensure we invest in sustainable infrastructure for responsive systems of care.

Then there is the issue of funding challenges, where again, the SAVRAA implementation provides an example to highlight our concerns. I explained to this Committee last year that, even prior to the SAVRAA expansion, NVRDC's hospital program rape crisis services were unfunded by roughly \$560,000.⁸ This was for the typical 450 survivors accessing SANE advocacy and follow-up care each year. Yet, as mentioned, the VOCA funds supporting these services was actually reduced in FY21. Then came the SAVRAA expansion.

NVRDC understood the important goal of collaborating with other agencies in order to expand existing sexual assault services under SAVRAA to more survivors. That is why in August of 2020, NVRDC applied for additional funding to strengthen our current hospital advocacy capacity at MedStar Washington Hospital Center, expand SANE access at non-hospital clinics, and create the responsive policies and collaborations necessary to ensure seamless work with community advocates. Our goal was that the requested funding would close the \$560,000+ gap we had identified in the existing services in prior years.

After the submission of our application, OVSJG communicated in the intent-to-fund process that any additional SAVRAA funding would require NVRDC to eliminate half of its hospital response, while taking on an entire new team of advocates to do community response 50% of the time.⁹ While this was the intent of how the program would function when it was fully operational in April of 2021, as the CityPaper¹⁰ recently covered, NVRDC has continued responding to all community and SANE accompaniment requests for an acute advocate, as well as long term follow-up. As of May, our community advocates launched 100% schedule coverage for any in-person requests. Furthermore, as of this week, community advocates are automatically accompanying MPD on all first and second degree sex abuse cases (estimated to range from 198-200 cases per year).

While NVRDC's advocacy team and leadership are very committed to ensuring survivors get the support they want following victimization, there are serious intangible costs that staff have endured

⁷ Under this funding structure, as of May 2021, the allowable system design by OVSJG would require multiple survivor transfers in order to work within agency and funding limitations (*see* Attachment 1). As of June 9, 2021, OVSJG communicated that this system design will be adjusted as DCRCC on-boards additional staff beyond what was contemplated in the FY21 award. Another supporting indication that the provided amounts were the minimum to stand-up the expansion services.

⁸ A fully funded program would include 5 additional advocates and 4 additional staff to do weekly administrative back-up on-call (currently this is still handled 24/7, each day of the year, by myself, our Director of Advocacy, and our Manager of Advocacy—in addition to our other primary tasks).

⁹ NVRDC received \$436,000 to onboard and launch the new team of community-response advocates.

¹⁰ Implementation of Expanded Advocacy Program Paused As Advocates Push to Center Rape Survivors, by Sarah Marloff, available at:

<https://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/518746/implementation-of-expanded-advocacy-program-paused-as-advocates-push-to-center-rape-survivors/>.

over the past year and a half. In order to ensure complete coverage of both responses, we have adjusted schedules, staff have sacrificed taking time off, and we are currently covering two levels of back-up 24/7 administrative on-call covered by just three members of the leadership team, including myself. Our advocates spent over a 1,000 hours in the emergency room supporting survivors during the pandemic last year and now many of them are volunteering to take extra shifts to cover 100% of the hospital and community response to ensure no gaps in coverage, despite the expectation that given the limited funding we were receiving we would only be doing half of this workload. To be clear, we are honored to carry this responsibility and appreciate that we are trusted to be good stewards of survivors' needs during this transition time of implementation delay, but it is not without a cost. These particular intangible effects are long-lasting on the wellbeing of our staff and the ultimate success and longevity of the District's sexual assault response services.

In addition to taking on community advocacy response, in December 2020, NVRDC was approached by Break the Cycle – which was closing – to ask us to shepherd their legacy by taking on their team and ensuring the continuance of free legal services for youth survivors in the District. Given the changing landscape with SAVRAA, it was important to us that youth survivors, who now have access to a confidential advocate under SAVRAA, can continue receiving necessary follow-up advocacy and legal services beyond the acute crisis moment. We would hope that OVSJG prioritizes ongoing support for this project¹¹ and ask this Council to ensure at least \$275,000 be made available to prevent any gap in legal services that would be devastating to DC youth.

Finally, we are encouraged by the Council's support of alternative responses to crime, like investing in expanded advocacy responses and alternatives to policing. We were particularly encouraged by the Council's inclusion of a \$200,000 investment in victims' access to restorative justice in the Second Look Act. However, we are unclear as to why we did not see this included in OVSJG's victim services budget for FY22. We strongly support the work of the DC Attorney General's Office in expanding RJ options, as well as the initiatives by Building Blocks DC, but we also hope we see the same level of dedication by OVSJG in investing in alternatives pathways for survivors of crime. We would like to see at least \$200,000 being awarded to a victim service organization providing access to these services for survivors, particularly in post-conviction litigation processes.

In summary, we would ask the Council to ensure SAVRAA funding is at least what all the collective partners need to do this work responsibly, for us this means at least \$2.4 million just for adult advocacy services in FY22 with additional investments in youth legal services required at \$275,000. We continue to encourage more transparency in how CVAF funds are prioritized year-over-year and an interactive process with grantees to both inform and better understand those how OVSJG funding priorities are developed would be helpful. Thank you for your continued support of survivors and please contact us with any questions.

¹¹ The Support and Legal Advocacy for Youth (SLAY) Program at NVRDC provides comprehensive advocacy and legal services to youth survivors (ages 13-24) of dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking with a special emphasis on minors and those living in Wards 4-8. This project provides culturally relevant, highly accessible legal services to the most marginalized victims. SLAY works with the health clinics at Roosevelt and Anacostia High School, as well as local youth service providers to provide prevention programming, outreach, and brief legal services directly in schools and community groups, so that youth know their rights and know where to find help when they need it. The SLAY team provides training and support for youth-serving professionals to help them identify signs of unhealthy and abusive relationships, support youth survivors, and provide appropriate resources.

SAVRAA Community Expansion

