



April 6, 2022

**Testimony of Bridgette Stumpf, Executive Director of Network for Victim Recovery of DC
OVSJG Budget Hearing, Fiscal Year 2023**

Thank you Chairperson Allen, other Committee members, and staff. My name is Bridgette Stumpf and I have the honor to serve as the executive director at Network for Victim Recovery of DC (NVRDC). Our organization aims to create survivor-defined justice through trauma-informed direct advocacy, legal, and therapeutic services.

Since 2012, we have supported over 6,000 individuals impacted by crime and have fostered collective action to ensure we are authentically co-creating an ecosystem of restoration in DC. We do not view community safety as a single pillar issue that can be addressed by investing in victim services alone or any other single sector or entity. In addition to supporting our partner agencies within the victim services portfolio, we are proud to collaborate with others who are also committed to the shared goal of community safety, such as reentry partners like Free Minds, MedStar's CVIP and SANE programs. We deeply understand the need for resourcing safety nets that address the root causes of violence—strengthening our underlying community fabric with equitable access to opportunities through education, employment, and safe and affordable housing.

We believe, and research suggests, that failing to address the impacts of trauma perpetuates the root causes of violence.¹ I am deeply concerned that the proposed OVSJG FY23 budget does just that.

I am disheartened, that for the fourth year in a row that NVRDC and others within the OVSJG grantee community, simply cannot maintain the quality or quantity of services without further prioritization and investment from the District. Since 2017, I have continued to tell you in these budget hearings that NVRDC received flat-funding to our core-services—and you heard this from many others at Oversight. I am trying to piece the puzzle together, because when I see OVSJG had a \$38 million dollar budget in FY17 and a \$105 million dollar budget in FY22; it's hard to understand why our core-services (many that are only offered by NVRDC) have remained flat-funded or even reduced during this period.²

¹ See “Trauma and its contribution to violent behavior”, Daniel J Neller and John Matthew Fabian, online available: <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/sites/crimeandjustice.org.uk/files/09627250608553387.pdf>; “The Relationship Between Community Violence and Trauma”, The Violence Policy Center, online available: <https://vpc.org/studies/trauma17.pdf>.

² For example, our largest, main project - to provide sexual assault crisis services - was funded at \$1,275,000 in FY19 and FY20. Additionally, we received a \$143,000 grant to provide elder services during that time. In FY21, OVSJG asked that we combine these two grants, effectively providing a \$143,000 cut to our core sexual assault crisis services grant. In FY22, we have received a \$250,000 addendum to that same large, core services grant for local flex funding directly to survivors. On paper, it may appear that our main grant has experienced a huge increase due to these flex dollars, but this is not the case. NVRDC also runs the Victim Legal Network of DC (VLNDC). We have received flat funding at \$187,187 for that program for the past 3 years. In terms of SAVRAA implementation, this year, NVRDC



To be very clear—I am *specifically* talking about funding that pays for our core-services; that means, the recurring dollars that go to our staff salaries and the operational expenses necessary to provide advocacy and legal services to victims of all crime types, as well as some of the cost to lead the city’s elder abuse coalition. The yearly one-time awards for specialized or off-cycle applications or funding for *additional* projects with *additional* delivery outcomes can easily distract from the bottom line—that our core-services have been flat-funded since 2017.

After another fiscal cycle without improvement, exacerbated by inflation, pandemic, and the rising cost and intangible impact of sustaining staff in this work—we are now approaching a critical threshold in the District’s ability to continue offering cutting-edge, professional victim services.

Why, given the increase in OVSJG’s overall budget, did multiple grantees talk about flat, reduced, or underfunded services and programs? Why hasn’t there been a collective strategy to drive the federal portfolio investments into our programs if the available budget was going to be too restrictive to meet the stated need in FY21? Why, when we attended the FY21 bidder’s conference in preparation for FY22 proposals, was my team told that we should not ask for more than what we had that current year? So, as encouraged, we asked for exactly what we had to continue operating core-services, youth services, etc. but we didn’t receive even that.

A priority for this hearing is to make sure OVSJG’s budget is adequately funded to support the community need, but equally important, we need to address how we expect this agency to be a good steward of these funds via values aligned in (1) transparency—where did the money go and what is left?; and (2) accountability—how was that money prioritized and *why*?

Simply put, we need to see the balance sheet.

As for accountability, as a grantee, I don’t understand what metrics, what outcomes, what priorities, reasons or objective evaluations drove OVSJG’s funding decisions. Part of the reason it’s so difficult to divine the true intention behind these decisions is the lack of effective communication about vision—the *intentional* and *purposeful* design underlying these specific decisions.

requested \$988,000 for this project. We received \$720,000, and scrambled to amend our budget proposal to make this work. NVRDC was glad to add youth services following Break the Cycle’s closure in FY21, but did not receive full funding for the project, and has had to fundraise to fill the gaps. Another new project that NVRDC added recently was the Restorative Justice program with funding from OVSJG in FY22. NVRDC was encouraged to partner with community based organizations reaching underserved communities, and is proud to be subgranting half of this award out to these partners, many of whom do not have the capacity to manage large awards, yet have the tremendous potential to increase outreach to hard-to-reach populations.

The point is that funding alone is not enough to actualize this vision. Change moves at the speed of trust, as opposed to the rate of transactions. Therefore, beyond allocating sufficient resources to OVSJG’s budget for FY23, the Council and OVSJG must work to transform their relationships with victim service providers and perhaps even other grantees. Transparency leads to shared accountability, and when leadership cannot be trusted to take this approach, we then rely on those who have power to do so. I am hoping the Committee can see the precipice where we sit. We need someone with more power than all of us you will hear from today to solve this problem with us. We cannot do it on our own.³

I wish I could better understand OVSJG and the mayor’s pressure points when creating this budget—I wish we all had the opportunity to get more curious with these key decision makers. Because I just don’t understand how, after years of flat-funding and the current state of trauma exposure related to crime in the District, that an \$11 million dollar reduction felt like the right decision. I don’t know whether this proposed budget—simply, at best, is misinformed on what’s needed, or, at worst—intentionally cutting victim services in favor of other priorities that are not solving the root causes of violence or addressing the consequences of trauma.

My colleagues will provide more detail as to the breakdown, but we know OVSJG’s budget requires an additional \$31⁴ million dollars in FY23.

Sadly, the total amount proposed isn’t close to enough to be seriously viable; especially after years of flat-funding, an \$11 million reduction is so unmoored from the reality of what’s needed that it cannot possibly reflect values of transparency and accountability, most importantly, it fails to lead us toward the ecosystem of restoration we all hope for.

³ In 2021 NVRDC completed a three-year long strategic planning process and restructured our organization to better align with the values derived from our [theory of change](#). 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. We invited 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 all responsible for driving macro-level changes that improve the larger nonprofit sector’s sustainability, reduces turnover, and ultimately improve our clients’ experiences.

⁴ \$31,480,221.



April 6, 2022
Testimony of Lindsey Silverberg, Head of Services
OVSJG Budget Hearing, Fiscal Year 2023

Thank you Chairperson Allen and other committee members, my name is Lindsey Silverberg and I oversee the delivery of NVRDC's core advocacy, case management, and legal services. I want to talk to you today about how years of flat—and sometimes reduced—funding has impacted our service delivery and how the failure to increase funding threatens the quality of future service delivery.

The refusal to properly fund core-services in the District is at a tipping point.

Testifying, as we have today and asking for more funding, always makes me feel ungrateful—it is hard and awkward. We are and will always be grateful to OVSJG for the investments they have made in us. For 10 years, OVSJG has worked with us to establish some of the most progressive and innovative victim service delivery models in the country. The work we have done in the sexual assault crisis and community response, elder abuse, the Victim Legal Network, our new youth services program—all these initiatives are possible because of support from OVSJG and the results truly have been remarkable in how they have improved the lives of District residents.

It is from this high place that the years of flat-funding are now causing NVRDC, and others, to react so strongly. I am terrified that years of remarkable investment and progress could be washed away or that these programs could backslide into previous decade. And while we are fortunate for these years of support, it wasn't fortune or chance that made our programs successful. It wasn't luck that our efforts to connect with the community and collaborate with our partners achieved demonstrable results—it was our staff. Their work, their professional acumen, their high standard of care and their commitment is what made our work funded by OVSJG so successful.

Investing in these services in 2022, like it was 2017, isn't just a blow to morale, it makes it financially irresponsible for our experienced staff to keep working at NVRDC. NVRDC has thrived because we have fostered and harnessed tremendous output from experienced staff who have lived these issues with our clients. While our staffs' commitment to the work may carry them through the early parts of their careers, it simply isn't right to exploit their dedication, and it isn't reasonable to expect we can retain that invaluable talent when they can afford a better life doing anything else.

We need to re-align the core-services funding with reality. The reality we are objectively seeing in the community's need for services as well as the reality of what it truly costs to serve the community.

When we see significant local dollar investments elsewhere in the public safety cluster, while at the same time there are significant decreases in OVSJG's overall budget, without further



explanation, the only inference we can make is that the District’s approach to crime, crime victims, healing, and accountability is one that chooses to treat unaddressed trauma as lesser, tertiary concerns of how we address community safety. That inference feels discordant with reality and objective data. The narrative centers on the rise in crime, but this proposed budget ignores the needs of those crime victims and the research and best practices that point us to investing in community solutions that prevent harm from violence.

To that end, OVSJG needs \$31,480,000 in additional funding which includes \$2,280,209 to close existing funding gaps in SAVRAA services (on top of the \$2.9M included in the proposed FY23 budget)—\$510,000 of this is to support the gap in adult advocacy crisis response services alone. However, funding alone is not enough to actualize this vision. Change moves at the speed of trust, as opposed to the rate of transactions.



April 6, 2022

**Testimony of Merry O'Brien, Head of Finance & Operations
OVSJG Budget Hearing, Fiscal Year 2023**

Good morning Chairperson Allen, other Committee members, and staff. My name is Merry O'Brien and I am testifying today as the Head of Finance & Operations of Network for Victim Recovery of DC (NVRDC). In this role, I am tasked with analyzing and balancing NVRDC's grant deliverables, operational outcomes, accounting, and our fidelity in throughput. From that perspective, I want to provide a clear picture for what NVRDC's core-services delivery is experiencing right now.

In the first quarter of FY22, NVRDC experienced a 45% increase in survivors screened for services compared to the first quarter of FY21. This isn't a COVID related anomaly either, we have seen an 88% increase in requests for services when comparing this time period to FY19.

Overall, this is a good thing. It means our community and system-based collaborations are achieving the results we want. However, this kind of success carries additional financial and programmatic challenges. The increased client needs have rippled across NVRDC programs, including our already taxed legal program. In the first quarter of this fiscal year, NVRDC's legal program received 125 referrals, an almost staggering 100% increase in demand for services over Q1 FY21.

We have also expanded our core-services programs in the past years. In FY21, Break the Cycle went into dissolution and NVRDC picked up the OVSJG-funded youth advocacy and legal services program. This team provides critical youth advocacy, outreach, and legal support; we were proud ensure the services and staff's employment could continue—but we need it properly funded to operate effectively. When we obtained the project in FY21 we received \$178,000 from OVSJG to cover an 8-month project period. However, in FY22 we received only \$250,000 to cover a 12-month project period requiring NVRDC to carry the financial burden to sustain these critical services. We then had to reduce the projected funded staff and deliverables to be commensurate with reduced funding. Given how rare youth legal support is in civil protection orders (CPOs), Title IX advocacy, and crime victims' rights, bottom line—survivors feel this most.

Flat-funding for core services since 2017 is an effective significant divestment, given the volume and scope of our work has continued to expand year-over-year.

It can be confusing, looking at the apparently large budget increases at OVSJG and some of the awards NVRDC has received, for example, to distribute flex funding. Despite the large dollar amounts on paper, these funds cannot be used to support core-services. In addition, the funds only permit a 10%, de-minimis expenditure for operations; which has proven woefully inadequate to cover the transactional costs of managing the funds. Generally speaking, our OVSJG grants



carry significant administrative costs in comparison to other funding sources. Let me explain: (1) the increase in client work, scope of work, and pandemic conditions have caused a corresponding increase in operational expenses; (2) the amount of time we are permitted to charge to operational expenses has decreased; and (3) our overall core-service awards have remained flat since 2017. When these factors combine, the result is that our OVSJG grant-funded programs are so resource starved as to be imminently unsustainable. We have detailed several times to this body the impact on our organization to ensure frontline staff responding in-person were adequately compensated with hazard pay. As we previously shared—we were told in March 2020 from OVSJG that hazard pay was not an allowable costs for our existing awards. Our objective was simple and simply stated: we want to compensate our frontline staff for putting themselves in harm’s way when delivering essential services.

Just this March, OVSJG leadership finally told us OVSJG can provide a “per diem” for eligible staff—as had been offered to MPD. That single piece of information from leadership would have solved a problem that we bent over backwards to overcome as a single organization.

However, as you have heard, funding alone is not enough. Change moves at the speed of trust, as opposed to the rate of transactions. In order to responsibly continue services under our OVSJG programs, yes, we need an additional \$31,480,221—which includes needed domestic violence services, the existing SAVRAA funding gap, and an additional \$650,221.