

Committee on the Judiciary
Performance Oversight Hearing on the Office of Victim Services & Justice Grants
Testimony of Lindsey Silverberg, Network for Victim Recovery of DC's Deputy Director
January 24, 2024

Thank you Chairwoman Pinto, other Committee members, and staff. I am Lindsey Silverberg, Deputy Director at Network for Victim Recovery of DC (NVRDC). Since May 2012, NVRDC has provided free, holistic and trauma-informed services to over 10,000 victims of crime in the District, including acute crisis support and advocacy, on-going case management, therapeutic, and legal services. NVRDC is unique because we support survivors of any type of victimization, and do so from a philosophy of survivor-defined justice, meaning that we do not try to influence our clients into thinking there is a “right” or “wrong” way to react to a crime, but instead support them in how they envision justice in their specific case.

The Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants (OVSJG) provides NVRDC with funding for several of our core programs including free legal and advocacy support for all crime victims. Additionally, OVSJG supports other innovation projects including the Victim Legal Network, our youth-focused advocacy and legal services, and coordination of the District's Collaborative Training and Response to Older Victims (DC TROV) coalition. In total the past year, NVRDC staff served 1,181 survivors, 75% of those were served using OVSJG funds, more than 900 of which were new clients.

OVSJG funding supports many of our most innovative partnerships. The Victim Legal Network of DC (VLNDC), is a project of NVRDC and the oldest legal services network in the District, boasting 27 member organizations. With a lean staffing model of only 2 FTEs, VLNDC manages to cut down the average intake time for multiple legal issues, from over a week to two days, for the nearly 600 crime victims they assist in connecting to various legal aid needs each year. We continue to believe that investing in proven, and formally evaluated, wraparound models would be an effective way to better reach all

survivors of violence and to quickly connect them to varied needed services in a trauma-informed way.

Last fiscal year, NVRDC took steps towards making DC a more restorative ecosystem by building capacity for local providers to offer restorative justice services to survivors and those who caused harm. OVSJG supported some of the seed-costs of this groundbreaking partnership with JG grantees Free Minds, DC Justice Lab, and others. But this work is historically and currently underfunded to reach its full impact. Based on limitations of the funding, NVRDC did not seek this support from OVSJG in FY24 and instead this work was supported by DC's Office of Attorney General and continues to receive funding from the Department of Justice's Office of Victim Programs. NVRDC believes that it is our responsibility to find ways to drive federal resources into DC when existing systems are failing to solve the challenges victims face. Broadening OVSJG's federal portfolio would benefit our community, in particular smaller, culturally specific providers. Given this, we have partnered with some of these programs on the federal projects we have received in the past two years to support youth services and access to restorative justice. We would welcome OVSJG's leadership in coordinating collaborations that result in more federal dollars being invested in our city.

We hope that under this new leadership OVSJG will work to implement transparency around funding priorities and rebuild trust with grantees. As part of this, we need OVSJG to strengthen its advocacy beyond its grantees, and holistically consider the issues affecting survivors in the District. As an example, each year the Domestic Violence Coalition surveys members to gauge the most under resourced and over taxed services. For years, mental health therapy for survivors has been under-resourced causing long waitlists and not enough trauma informed therapists. Despite this clear evidence of need, OVSJG required NVRDC reallocate funds in our FY24 budget intended to pay for part of our therapist and encouraged NVRDC to work with organizations receiving funds already

for mental health. Our director of therapeutic services saw a 132% increase in need from FY22 to FY23—providing over 358 sessions as a solo practitioner. When other providers are already facing under resourcing, waitlists, etc., collaboration will not solve this problem. OVSJG’s arbitrary limits around what services can be funded in FY24, without any grounding in supportive data, is problematic.

We are hopeful about OVSJG’s current leadership and a clear effort to enhance communication with grantees. We will continue to offer recommendations around how this office can improve its strategic support of survivors by moving toward flexible multi-year funding, streamlining and enhancing reporting processes and changes, and leading an example of transparency around equitable pay. We appreciate OVSJG’s continued support of NVRDC’s work and look forward to moving DC towards a restorative and trauma informed ecosystem that betters the experiences of our clients, staff, and communities in partnership with you Chairwoman Pinto.