

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
February 10, 2023

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 8,800 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) provided NVRDC with over 3 million dollars in funding this fiscal year 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, coordination of the District's Collaborative Training and Response to Older Victims (DC TROV) coalition, and some of our trauma informed education. 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.

With this funding, NVRDC has the privilege of providing advocacy for adult survivors of sexual assault as of one of two agencies responsible for the adult advocacy response under the rights provided in the Sexual Assault Victims' Rights Amendment Act (SAVRAA). While NVRDC led the advocacy services since 2012, this program grew in 2021 with the expansion of SAVRAA. The partnership now includes MedStar Washington Hospital Center, DC Forensic Nurse Examiners, DC Rape Crisis Center, DC Victim Hotline, and NVRDC. For our part, providing survivors with acute crisis support and a long-term advocate offering consistent, available advocacy throughout the post-exam recovery and police processes is a quintessential element of our model. Moreover, our advocates provide vital services that include free transportation, entry into therapeutic services, and referrals to legal services where their advocate from the hospital can continue to support them throughout the entirety of their recovery.

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 3 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. 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 supports some of the costs of this groundbreaking partnership with JG grantees Free Minds, DC Justice Labs, and others. But this work is historically and currently underfunded to reach its full impact.

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 Councilwoman Pinto.