



**WORKING GROUP ON RESOURCE COORDINATION TO SUPPORT VICTIMS OF  
SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, VIOLENCE AND DOMESTIC ABUSE**

**MEETING #1 – DECEMBER 14, 2023 @ 11:00 AM**

**ROOM 118, BALTIMORE COUNTY HISTORIC COURTHOUSE AND VIA WEBEX.**

**Welcome and Introduction**

- Henry Callegary (Working Group Coordinator) welcomed the members of the Working Group.
- The primary focus of the Working Group is to find solutions to the ongoing issues of sexual exploitation, violence, and domestic abuse in Baltimore County.
- County Executive Johnny Olszewski pledged the creation of this Working Group in his FY2024 Budget Message.
- The Working Group combines County and State agencies with private partners, and advocates to ensure that resources are effectively coordinated to support victims and survivors of sexual exploitation, violence, and domestic abuse.
- Future meetings will include a variety of presenters, ranging from educators to policy makers.
- The focus of this first meeting is to introduce the members of the Working Group, identify areas of interest and concern, and establish future goals for the Working Group.

**Members of the Working Group**

- **Audrey Bergin: Manager of the Domestic Violence Program (DOVE) at Northwest Hospital (A Part of LifeBridge Health)**
  - DOVE addresses victims of abuse and domestic violence.
  - Northwest Hospital is open 24/7 for survivors and victims.
  - DOVE participates in the Lethality Assessment Project (LAP) along with the Family Crisis Center and TurnAround, Inc.
  - DOVE provides a range of services to approximately 1,600 individuals every year.
  - One of DOVE's goals from the Working Group is to address housing for survivors and victims.

- **Roz Berkowitz: Vice-Chair of the Baltimore County Commission for Women**
  - A long-time advocate for survivors of sexual violence, including Co-Chairing the Maryland Fatality Review State Implementation Team.
  - One of Ms. Berkowitz' goal is to implement a Family Justice Center in Baltimore County.
- **Rebecca Allyn: Victim Services Program Manager, Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth and Victim Services.**
  - The Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth and Victim Services provides several hundred million dollars in grant funding every year. The Office works closely with a number of other boards and councils in Maryland to ensure that victims and survivors are supported. The Office works with local law enforcement, including the State's Attorney's Offices, to implement policy changes for the betterment of crime prevention and victims.
- **Scott Shellenberger: Baltimore County State's Attorney**
  - In addition to serving as the chief prosecutor for Baltimore County, Mr. Shellenberger sits on the statewide Sexual Assault Evidence Kit Policy Funding and Committee. The Baltimore County State's Attorney's Office employs four dedicated Assistant State's Attorney's to domestic violence and sexual assault cases, and the State's Attorney's Office handles about 45,000 cases annually.
- **Carmen Christiana: Office of Community Engagement**
  - Ms. Christiana is joining the Working Group primarily to provide assistance from the Office of Community Engagement.
- **Ashley Meyer: Director of Grants Management, Baltimore County Office of Budget and Management**
  - Ms. Meyer oversees grant management in Baltimore County, and works to leverage existing external funding received by the County. In this role, she collaborates with a number of different agencies and departments in the County.
- **Giuliana Valencia-Banks: Immigrant Affairs Outreach Coordinator**
  - Ms. Valencia-Banks oversees initiatives in Baltimore County to better serve our migrant community, advocate for those who do not speak English as a first language, and improve cultural competency in Baltimore County.
- **Councilman Pat Young: Baltimore County Council**
  - Councilman Young represents southwest Baltimore County in the County Council (District 1).
  - His goal is to help provide legislative solutions for the Working Group.
- **Janine Scott: Chief Attorney, Maryland Legal Aid for Baltimore County**
  - Maryland Legal Aid is a statewide non-profit law firm that provides free legal representation to low-income and no-income Marylanders, including in the areas of domestic violence and family law.
  - Ms. Scott's goal is to expand community knowledge about the services available in Baltimore County, to collaborate with the members of the Working Group, and to increase advocacy for teenage survivors who are victims of stalking and intimate partner violence.

- **Shelby Frink: Executive Director, Family Crisis Center of Baltimore County**
  - The Family Crisis Center of Baltimore County is a comprehensive domestic violence agency that operates the emergency shelter system for Baltimore County, as well as the helpline. Additionally, the Family Crisis Center operates an abuser intervention program, provides victim advocacy, a children’s program, and counseling services.
  - Ms. Frink’s goal is to look at the Family Justice Center model, and to expand awareness as to preventative measures to interrupt the cycle of violence and abuse.
- **Krista Trahan: Co-Director of the Child Advocacy Center of Baltimore County (CAC)**
  - The Child Advocacy Center provides services to children who are the victims of violence, abuse, and exploitation. The Center is located within the Crime Against Children unit of the Baltimore County Police Department, and provides a single location for interviews, forensic examinations, and some services. The Center works closely with the State’s Attorney’s Office and TurnAround, Inc.
  - Ms. Trahan’s goals include exploring the possibility of a single location dedicated to providing services for victims and survivors.
- **Amanda Rodriguez: Executive Director of TurnAround, Inc.**
  - TurnAround provides comprehensive domestic violence services in Baltimore County, including services for survivors of human trafficking. They are a comprehensive provider, with services including emergency shelering, counseling, and advocacy services. TurnAround has operated in Baltimore County since 1979.
- **Amy Blank: Baltimore County Commission for Women**
  - Ms. Blank is a long-time advocate for children and families, including successfully lobbying for legislation in areas including case reporting on intimate partner violence, child abuse, and human trafficking.
  - Ms. Blank’s coal is to improve coordination and cooperation among the various providers in Baltimore County.
- **State Senator Shelly Hettleman: Maryland State Senate.**
  - Senator Hettleman represents District 11, which covers parts of central and western Baltimore County.
  - Senator Hettleman successfully sponsored and passed numerous pieces of legislation addressing domestic violence and sexual health.
- **Aimee Bollinger-Smith: Coordinator of Community Services, Baltimore County Department of Social Services.**
  - The Department of Social Services oversees grants relating to child welfare, employs specialist that work with victims, and works with private partners to ensure the needs of County residents are met. The Department of Social Services is also a major sponsor of the Domestic Violence Conference.
  - Ms. Bollinger Smith’s goals include better data collection and sharing among service providers.

- **Alicia Bickoff: Deputy Director, CHANA**
  - CHANA provides services to Jewish victims and survivors in Baltimore City and Baltimore County, including crisis intervention, education, and consultation, as well as spreading awareness of issues concerning abuse and sexual violence within the community.
- **Chief Robert McCullough and Captain Brian Edwards: Baltimore County Police Department**
  - The Baltimore County Police Department works closely with County agency and service providers to meet the needs of County residents. The Department has a Domestic Violence Unit, as well as a Special Victims Unit. There are domestic violence coordinators in each precinct.
  - The Police Department's goals within the working group are to improve policies and procedures within the Department, improve data sharing with other agencies, and continue to advocate for laws assisting victims (including statewide case tracking).
- **Lisa Nitsch: Chief Operating Officer, House of Ruth**
  - The House of Ruth provides comprehensive domestic abuse and sexual violence services throughout Maryland. They provide services to thousands of Baltimore County residents, including wraparound services for abusive partners.
  - Ms. Nitsch's goals are to improve coordination among providers, improving access to affordable house, improve regional coordination, and a number of other policy solutions.
- **State Delegate Jennifer White Holland: Maryland House of Delegates**
  - Delegate White Holland represents District 10 in the Maryland House of Delegates, including much of western Baltimore County.
  - Delegate White Holland hopes that the Working Group will improve collaboration between providers, and help inform legislative goals, including connecting constituents with services, remove barriers to services, and address root causes.
- **Laure Ruth: Chief Programs Officer and Legal Director, Women's Law Center**
  - The Women's Law provides services to victims of domestic and sexual violence, including providing representation in protective order cases. While the Women's Law Center's administrative office is located in Towson, there is a protective order group that travels to all four courthouses located in Baltimore County.
- **Melisa Cross: SAFE Program, Greater Baltimore Medical Center**
  - The SAFE program includes 25 nurses and 11 advocates who provide services out of GBMC. These resources are holistic, and include emergency shelter, transportation, and even gift cards for food and other needs. The SAFE program also has an advocacy wing, working in schools to speak out against teen sexual violence. They work closely with the Child Advocacy Center, and address human trafficking and non-fatal strangulation as well.

### **Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic and Challenges Ahead**

- Members of the Working Group shared their perspectives on how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their organization, and identified challenges on the horizon. The following is a list of areas identified as posing difficulties for the members of the Working Group:
  - The level of domestic violence increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, and there has not been a decrease since public health safety measures were lifted.
  - Cost and lack of housing has posed a significant hurdle for survivors and organizations looking to find shelter for the individuals they service.
  - There has been an increase in elder abuse commensurate to the increase in domestic and sexual violence.
  - There is a lack of adequate mental health services available.
  - There has been an increase in “burnout” among mental health professionals working in the areas of sexual violence and exploitation. Salaries remain lower than the national average, and leading to professionals leaving the field.
  - While there are significant grants available to providers, the time and cost associated with applying for them is prohibitive.
  - There is a lack of foster care placements for minor children who are the victims of sexual violence and abuse.
  - There is a need for more resources to be devoted to early intervention with perpetrators of domestic violence to break the cycle.
  - There is a need for greater multilingual services and cultural competency. Currently, there is a barrier for people who do not speak English as a first language to apply for and receive services, and non-English speaking minor children are often blocked from placement as a result. There is also a need for greater cultural outreach into communities where awareness about domestic and sexual violence is not as prevalent.

### **Topics for Future Meetings**

- The members of the Working Group discussed topics for future meetings, which will be held every two months. The following is a list of proposed topics:
  - Housing.
  - College, elementary and secondary education.
  - Human trafficking.
  - Perspectives from the migrant community, and those who don’t speak English as a first language.
  - Grant funding.
  - The role of faith-based organizations.
  - Family Justice Centers and their potential role in Baltimore County.
  - The role of technology and social media.
  - The role of the Department of Juvenile Services.

### **Next Meeting**

- The next meeting will be held in February 2024, with proposed dates circulated by Henry Callegary.