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**Creating a Sexual Assault Council in Los Angeles County to Support Survivors  
and Prevent Sexual Violence**

The Los Angeles County Commission for Women’s Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Assault voted on April 11, 2022, to recommend that the Board of Supervisors establish a Sexual Assault Council in order to coordinate a countywide response for survivors of sexual violence.<sup>1</sup> Sexual violence impacts a significant number of our community members, but the County has yet to establish an entity focused on responding to this issue. A Sexual Assault Council would bring systemwide stakeholders together to coordinate best practices for efforts focused on both prevention and response. Sexual violence requires the design of its own response because of the survivors’ unique needs, the forensic specialization, the expertise needed by law enforcement and prosecutors, and the existing structure of organizations and funding streams. The County needs a Sexual Assault Council in order to support survivors in

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<sup>1</sup> Commission for Women’s Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Assault, Establishing the Los Angeles County Sexual Assault Coordinating Council (April 11, 2022), <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/167842.pdf>.

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their recovery and to prevent sexual violence from spreading in our communities.

Sexual assault is a serious and expensive public health issue that can impact everyone in the County. It is also an issue of social equity because the impact of sexual violence can be compounded by other issues, such as immigration status, reproductive and economic justice, domestic violence, child abuse, human trafficking, and more. While existing data likely undercounts the extent of sexual violence in our communities, the CDC reports that “over half of women and almost one in three men have experienced sexual violence involving physical contact during their lifetimes. [Further,] one in four women and about one in 26 men have experienced completed or attempted rape.”<sup>2</sup> In 2017, researchers found that the “estimated lifetime cost of rape was \$122,461,” including costs for healthcare, lost work productivity, criminal justice system responses, and property loss and damage.<sup>3</sup> We are still working to understand the impact of the pandemic on sexual violence rates, but we can hypothesize that sexual violence did not decrease.

Despite the magnitude of sexual violence, there is no County entity focused on coordinating response and prevention services for sexual violence. An informal Sexual Assault Council existed in the County from 2001-2006. This group helped to build support systems, developed Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) standards, advocated to change the law around notification of DNA kit testing, supported a new rape kit lab at Cal State LA, and identified practices to reduce the DNA kit backlog.

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<sup>2</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Fast Facts: Preventing Sexual Violence (June 22, 2022), <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/fastfact.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Cora Peterson et al., Lifetime Economic Burden of Rape Among US Adults (June 1, 2017), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5438753/>.

Because the group was not a formal County entity, the members stopped meeting in 2006. Since then, there has been no support for the coordination of work related to this issue. For example, the number of SART sites has decreased from 21 in 2006 to only 9 in 2022.<sup>4</sup> These sites are also not geographically organized, forcing some victims to travel long distances to receive services. A coordinating body is necessary to ensure that services increase, not decrease, and are easily accessible to those who need them.

The Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Assault recommended the creation of the Sexual Assault Council to solve issues related to coordination and service access, among others. A Sexual Assault Council could address those issues by coordinating data collection and analysis, helping to identify best practices and system-level improvements, finding gaps in services while preventing duplication of services, providing public education, coordinating advocacy for additional resources, and assisting with awareness and prevention. The Ad Hoc Committee recommended a multi-disciplinary membership that includes individuals from law enforcement, crime labs, victim services, forensic nurses, rape crisis centers, prosecutors' offices, and child protective services. By including all the stakeholders, the Council will be able to coordinate among jurisdictions on a systemwide level.

The Sexual Assault Council will not duplicate the work of existing advisory bodies, such as the Domestic Violence Council, because sexual assault is a discrete issue.<sup>5</sup> Sexual violence can impact anyone, while domestic violence is limited to intimate partner relationships. This distinction means that sexual assault survivors can

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<sup>4</sup> See Commission for Women's Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Assault, *supra* note 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

have very different needs than domestic violence survivors. For example, forensic collection, including DNA kits, are not typically required in domestic violence cases. The investigation and prosecution of sexual assault cases require specific expertise. The safety needs of sexual assault survivors differ from those of domestic violence survivors. Lastly, the organizations and funding streams that serve survivors generally exclusively support sexual violence survivors. To reduce gaps in services, the County must invest in a coordinating body to focus on sexual violence response and prevention.

The Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Violence report found that the County requires a Sexual Assault Council to “ensure a coordinated and multidisciplinary system of response from law enforcement, crime labs, victim services, forensic nurses, rape crisis centers, the office of the district attorney, and child protective services. This would provide support, advocacy, and healing for survivors of sexual violence and make system improvements and improved response.”<sup>6</sup> The County must invest in the coordination necessary to ensure that residents across the County can have equal access to the resources they require to heal. Further, the County must support the identification and implementation of best practices to prevent and reduce the impact of sexual violence in our communities through the creation of a Sexual Assault Council.

**WE, THEREFORE, MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), in consultation with the Department of Public Health and the Commission for Women, to report back in 30 days with recommendations for the structure, placement, and funding for a new Sexual Assault Council. The CEO should consider:

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<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

1. The design of the Food Equity Roundtable and the Domestic Violence Council when making recommendations about the structure of the Sexual Assault Council;
2. The Department of Public Health and the new Justice Care and Opportunities Department as potential placements; and
3. Philanthropy or any other funding source, including funding associated with the Sexual Assault Council's proposed placement, when making recommendations around funding for the Sexual Assault Council.