

Addressing Physical Safety and Mental Health For Women Fleeing Domestic Violence, Sexual Violence and Human Trafficking

The number of unhoused women in Los Angeles County (County) exceeds 21,000 annually and continues to grow. Many of these women suffer from the effect of traumatic events, including domestic violence, sexual violence, and human trafficking. Many have serious mental health issues. There is a critical shortage of services that focus on the unique needs of women struggling with homelessness and trauma as a result of fleeing physical and sexual abuse.

According to the 2023 Point in Time Count, 29% of unhoused people identify as women and 25% suffer from serious mental illness. More than 90% of unhoused women experienced victimization in their lifetime. For over a decade, unaccompanied single unhoused women—and female identifying people—have been one of the fastest growing unhoused populations. Homelessness among unaccompanied single women increased 41% from 2013 - 2019. One in four of these women report wanting mental health services and not being able to receive them.

The County’s Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) currently provides hotel/interim housing stays and public services for women with children who are fleeing domestic violence. For unaccompanied women (that is, women without children) fleeing domestic violence, however, there are little to no services. They are limited to a single night hotel stay which is not enough time to access services, documents, and public

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MOTION

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benefits, much less permanent housing, and mental health treatment. By comparison, women with children receive 16 nights of housing.

Barriers to finding a safe shelter to receive services and mental health support for unaccompanied women are significant; 45% of unaccompanied women cited barriers such as lack of available domestic violence shelter beds and concerns about privacy, safety, and lack of shelter options. The County's homelessness and mental health system does not have the infrastructure in place to meet the very specific needs of this sub-population. As a result, victims are left in public spaces that make them even more vulnerable.

While the County works hard to create more housing, there are additional steps this Board can take to increase safety, improve access to mental health treatment, and provide a realistic time frame for women fleeing domestic violence, sexual violence and human trafficking to recover and seek permanent housing. The County can build on policies and programs currently in place and bring County-wide providers and departments into alignment on best practices.

In 2016, the Board of Supervisors passed a [motion](#) to approve the implementation of the Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse & Neglect (ICAN) Guidelines for Effective Response to Domestic Abuse (GERDA) protocols in County departments. The County's GERDA Executive Committee also developed a plan to coordinate training on these Protocols, with a focus on cultural and linguistic sensitivity. This training was mandatory for several County departments, but not for homeless service providers and access centers where unaccompanied women fleeing domestic violence often seek help.

In 2020, the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) created a training academy specifically designed for homeless service providers who come into contact with women fleeing domestic violence. However, this training is not mandatory.

The Board of Supervisors should prioritize programmatic and policy alignment of County departments and County-funded providers specializing in mental health, homelessness and social services with the Domestic Violence Regional Coordinator's best practices, the recommendations set forth by ICAN and the GERDA Executive Committee, and the domestic violence training created by LAHSA. This will better ensure

women fleeing domestic and other forms of violence will receive trauma-informed and culturally sensitive care at any access center/provider contracted with the County.

It is also important to bridge existing gaps in domestic violence programming with safe housing and transportation. According to the [Domestic Violence Homeless Services Coalition](#), in 2023, there are less than 1,000 domestic violence shelter beds across the County. There are, however, over 15,000 people who call the Domestic Violence Hotline each year for services. Homeless service providers report that the lack of free and safe transportation is a major barrier to getting women fleeing domestic violence, sexual violence and human trafficking to a safe place.

WE THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

- 1) Direct the Director of the Department of Public Health (DPH), in collaboration with the Directors of Public Social Services (DPSS) Department of Health Services, Department of Mental Health (DMH), Department of Consumer and Business Affairs' Office of Immigrant Affairs, Department of Public Health's Office of Women's Health, and the Executive Directors of the Domestic Violence Council, the Women & Girls' Initiative, and the Chief Executive Office's Homeless Initiative (CEO-HI) to work in collaboration with Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) to report back in writing in 90 days with a proposed plan to make mandatory the domestic violence training program created by LAHSA and Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse & Neglect (ICAN) for all domestic violence Regional Coordinators and homeless service providers that are contracted through the County of Los Angeles. The report back plan should include:
 - a. An analysis of the components that should be included in this training, a list of providers that should participate, and costs to provide the training within a 6–12-month period;
 - b. A description of the current intake process homeless service providers use for persons fleeing domestic violence;
 - c. Recommendations to align County providers' intake forms and assessment processes with a trauma-informed model to ensure homeless and mental health providers' intake forms appropriately identify persons who may be

actively fleeing domestic violence and connect them to appropriate services;

- d. Recommendations to implement culturally sensitive and trauma-informed Release of Information forms (ROI's) throughout relevant County contracted providers based on feedback from persons with lived experience and the Domestic Violence Council, LAHSA and ICAN.
 - e. The components above should take into account the intersecting needs of survivors of sexual violence and human trafficking.
- 2) Direct the Director of DPH, in collaboration with the Director of DPSS to report back in writing in ~~60~~90 days outlining the current process for helping unaccompanied women who are actively fleeing domestic violence, sexual violence and human trafficking. This report back should include:
- a. An analysis on how the County can keep this population housed in a hotel/motel program long enough to determine eligibility for public benefits by increasing the length of stay from a single night to 90 days;
 - b. The cost and funding options, developed with LAHSA, Domestic Violence Regional Coordinator's and ICAN, to achieve Directive 2.a. above;
 - c. A cost projection to include mental health services through DMH and/or DMH-contracted providers in the first 60 days of the client's intake process and hotel stay;
 - d. An outline of the current process for mental health services for this population and a recommendation to strengthen the process by which mental health services are delivered.
- 3) Direct the Executive Director of CEO-HI, in coordination with the Executive Director of the Women & Girls Initiative, the Director of DPSS, and the CEO of Metro or designee, to report back in writing in 60 days on ways the County can provide free Taxi Vouchers through the Metro Low Income Fare is Easy (LIFE) Program for victim-survivors who meet the income threshold to qualify for free transportation. Include in this report back:

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- a. A cost projection to provide this Metro service to contracted providers in special circumstances when the victim is actively fleeing.
- b. A description of how LA Care is currently using the [Call-the-Car](#) ride-share program and cost projections of using Call-the-Car to quickly transport unaccompanied unhoused women fleeing domestic violence to a safe destination.

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