

Testimony Survivors of Domestic Violence

To: Members of the [Insert Committee Name, e.g., House Appropriations or Judiciary Committee]

From: Andrea Neal, Retired Public Servant (30 Years) & Survivor

Date: March 7, 2026

Position: SUPPORT

The Dual Perspective

My name is Andrea Neal. I stand before you today to speak on the systemic barriers that trap survivors of domestic violence in cycles of poverty and danger. My perspective is informed by two lenses: first, as a survivor who endured years of physical and emotional abuse; and second, as a dedicated public servant who spent 30 years working for the State of Maryland, including 11 years with the Montgomery County Office of Child Support.

The Invisible Barrier: Non-Physical Abuse

Early in my life, I survived four years of brutal physical violence. Later, I spent 15 years in a marriage defined by verbal and emotional abuse. Because this abuse was not "seen" on my body—no marks, no broken bones—it was incredibly difficult to access help.

The system often fails to recognize that emotional abuse has physical and economic consequences:

- **Workplace Instability:** The mental weight led to tardiness and missed days.
- **Financial Coercion:** Being placed on a "sick day ticket" required a doctor's note, but because my abuser controlled the finances, I could not afford the co-pay.
- **Isolation:** When fleeing, survivors often have no access to money, while the abuser knows their employer, family, and every detail of their life.

The Systemic Trap: TANF and Child Support Cooperation

During my 11 years at the Office of Child Support, I witnessed a recurring tragedy. To receive Cash Assistance (TANF) through the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), mothers are required to file a child support application. This requires disclosing the abuser's:

- Full Name and SSN

- Current Address and Employer
- Physical Description (eye/hair color, weight)

For a woman fleeing an active abuser, providing this information is a death warrant. I watched women come to our office five to seven days in a row, caught in a "bureaucratic loop" between Child Support and DHHS. They were terrified that cooperation would lead to violent repercussions, yet if they did not provide the information, they were denied the very benefits they needed to survive.


1. **Eliminates the Loop:** Create a streamlined, trauma-informed waiver process that prevents survivors from being shuffled between agencies while their benefits hang in the balance.

Based on reports from Montgomery County, MD, and Maryland court data, the number of domestic violence cases and related legal actions for 2023–2025 are as follows:

2023–2024 Domestic Violence Statistics

- Protective Order Hearings: In 2023, there were nearly 3,000 domestic violence final protective order hearings in Montgomery County.
- Investigated Cases: Between 2024 and 2025 (roughly early 2025), the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office Domestic Violence Unit investigated approximately 400 cases, specifically focusing on high-risk incidents such as strangulation or significant physical injury.
- Fatalities/Near Fatalities: From 2017 to 2023, the Montgomery County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team (DVFRT) reviewed 14 cases resulting in death or serious injury, which included 12 homicides and three attempted homicides.
- Victim Services: In FY 2024, at least 1,229 victims were served by local programs (including shelter and nonresidential services).
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- [Court Watch Montgomery +3](#)
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2024–2025 Trends

- Ongoing Investigations: The Domestic Violence Unit reported high caseloads during the 2024–2025 period.
- Fatality Review: In 2024, the DVFRT reviewed cases finding that some offenders committed suicide after arresting for domestic violence, leading to a recommendation for more study on this trend.
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- [Montgomery County \(.gov\) +3](#)

I am the, founder of the non-profit **Beyond Our Strongholds Successfully**.

In 2023, this county held nearly 3,000 protective order hearings, yet our high-risk unit only has the capacity to investigate 400 cases. That leaves **2,600 families** in a 'safety gap' where we don't know their level of danger.

We are requesting a one-time grant of **[\$1000.00]** to conduct on-site safety surveys at the Rockville and Silver Spring courthouses. This project will identify hidden lethality—like strangulation and firearm access—in those 2,600 unmonitored cases and provide every petitioner with an immediate, localized safety plan.

Don't let a court order be just a piece of paper. Help us turn this data into a shield for Montgomery County survivors. Thank you."

Closing

I have retired after three decades of service, yet this problem persists. We must ensure that state assistance is a bridge to safety, not a trap that leads back to an abuser. I know firsthand the "suffering, sweat, and tears" required to break free. Let us make that path easier for those still in the shadows.