



## VICTIM SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD

On behalf of the Montgomery County Victim Services Advisory Board (“VSAB”), we provide this testimony to the Interagency Commission on Homelessness (“ICH”) to seek ICH’s assistance in advocating for, and ultimately achieving, certain policy changes that will simultaneously help protect domestic violence victims and reduce homelessness in the County.

*First*, to put our proposed policy changes into context, we wanted to provide the ICH with statistics concerning the current population of domestic violence (“DV”) victims who are discharged from the Betty Ann Krahnke Center (“BAK”), the County’s only dedicated shelter for DV victims. Specifically, the most up-to-date data shows that:

- BAK serves ~200 adult DV victims annually.
- Placed annually, 8-12% of discharged DV victims need Montgomery County emergency services and are housed in motels after BAK discharge. This is ~20-30 victims and potentially their children.
- Annually, ~5% of discharged DV victims return to their abuser. This is ~10 victims.

The high cost of living in Montgomery County, costs of childcare, coupled with low level job skills, makes DV survivors highly vulnerable to further victimization, loss of employment, and chronic homelessness. DV victims often face many additional barriers to affordable housing due to poor credit and legal problems often stemming from the underlying abuse. Some victims might also have pending immigration cases that prevent them from seeking lawful employment. Further, many housing programs do not favor survivors because they are afraid that DV survivors will bring problems with them or make the community unsafe. Finally, most survivors do not qualify for permanent supportive housing services which require a documented permanent disability. Although they often suffer from mental illnesses related to DV, such as depression, substance abuse and PTSD, those conditions are not seen as serious barriers to housing and therefore they are not meeting the criteria for permanent supportive housing.

Housing options are critical to ensuring that DV victims in the County remain safe from their abusers and/or stay off the streets upon leaving BAK. The VSAB strongly advocates that the County provides a permanent source of bridge housing for DV victims and case management services. We request that the ICH join the VSAB in supporting this goal.





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*Second*, the VSAB encourages the ICH to provide guidance for applicants who wish to obtain DV bonus funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”) as part of HUD’s Continuum of Care (“CoC”) grants. We understand that, to date, the ICH believes that the organizations applying for this DV bonus funding – which is only available on a year-to-year basis – are not meeting application requirements. As a result, the ICH has not sought DV bonus funding that may be available. The VSAB is willing to work with the ICH towards this goal.

*Third*, and finally, the VSAB would like ICH’s assistance in pushing the County government to change the existing policy concerning DV victims who are seeking County assistance vouchers. Under the VI-SPDAT Vulnerability Index that the County uses to determine the need for housing assistance, DV victims receive only a one-point priority for housing options over other applicants. The VSAB is seeking the ICH’s support in pushing the County to revise this point system, so that more housing options will be available to DV victims. The VSAB believes that this change, if adopted, would help close the gap between those DV victims discharged from BAK and those that qualify for County housing assistance.

We look forward to working with you on these policy goals.

