

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

### INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence (DV), according to the Wisconsin State Statute, is defined as any incident, offense, or victimization of domestic abuse committed "by an adult person against his or her spouse or former spouse, against an adult with whom the person resides or formerly resided, or against an adult with whom the person shares a child."<sup>1</sup> DV victimizations include "intentional infliction of physical pain, physical injury or illness, intentional impairment of physical condition, first-degree sexual assault, and any physical act that may reasonably cause the other person to fear imminent engagement in any of the conducts described above." Other terminologies for DV include dating violence, pregnancy violence, rape, intimate partner violence (IPV), and battering.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this brief is to provide evidence and policy options to the Governor's Council on Domestic Abuse to address the absence of consistent financing for DV victim services and research in Wisconsin. For the purposes of this brief, DV and IPV are used interchangeably.

### OVERVIEW OF THE PROBLEM

Domestic violence is a significant public health concern that impacts the overall health of individuals and families.<sup>3,4</sup> IPV constitutes a serious human rights abuse, which imposes an enormous burden on individuals, families and the United States health care system.<sup>5-10</sup> According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 12 million US citizens are victims of physical or sexual violence, every year by an intimate partner.<sup>2,10</sup> In the United States, more than one in four women and one in seven men will experience IPV in their lifetime.<sup>2,10,11</sup> Black women experience IPV at 35% higher rates than White women.<sup>2,10,11</sup> Economic estimates by CDC suggest that the lifetime economic cost of IPV to the US population is \$3.6 trillion; including \$2.1 trillion in medical costs, and \$73 billion in criminal justice costs.<sup>12</sup> The lifetime per-victim cost for women is \$103,767 and \$23,414 for men.<sup>12</sup>

With one in every four women beaten, raped, or stalked by a current or previous intimate partner at some point in her life, domestic abuse has a significant economic impact on Wisconsin.<sup>13</sup> In addition to being a severe public health issue, DV in Wisconsin is a serious economic problem that requires an immediate solution. According to a new study by the Sojourner Family Peace Center, the state's largest provider of domestic violence prevention and intervention programs, the annual number of DV victims in Wisconsin is 94,299, with \$657.8 million in economic losses statewide.<sup>14</sup> Wisconsin's economic loss in 2020 is higher than that of other states, notably South Carolina, which has a loss of only \$358.4 million.<sup>15</sup> The most significant measured economic loss in Wisconsin is loss of life, which accounts for \$241.5 million or 36.7% of total losses, followed by loss of work productivity at \$111.9 million (17%) and physical health care at \$86.3 million (13.1%). The yearly criminal court costs in Wisconsin are \$47 million and the yearly civil court expenditures are \$61.7 million. Each reported incident of domestic violence cost the state an average of \$6,976. Domestic violence, on the other hand, is an under-reported crime; as a result, cost estimates are underreported. **Hence, there is a significant need for investing in prevention, research, and service delivery serving abuse survivors and their families, particularly those that are culturally specific.**

### The State of Domestic Violence Services in Wisconsin

The people of Wisconsin provide financing to DV victim services providers and shelters around the state through the Department of Children and Families (DCF).<sup>16</sup> A recent examination of revenue from a wide and representative sample of Wisconsin DV agencies discovered that private citizens have contributed roughly half of the investment in victim assistance.<sup>16</sup> Domestic violence agencies in Wisconsin have done their share by working relentlessly to establish this support. Currently, DCF funds victim services for 64 non-profit organizations, 11 tribes, and two counties. Over 38,000 people were

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served by Wisconsin DV victim assistance providers; the state offers 42 domestic violence shelters that give over 200,000 nights of shelter to victims and their children each year.<sup>16</sup> During the most recent reporting period, about 7,500 Wisconsin residents obtained safe shelter, with approximately half of them being children.<sup>16</sup> However, a local organization was unable to respond to nearly 3,000 adult requests for shelter due to a lack of capacity and resources.<sup>16</sup> Domestic violence victim assistance providers help victims have a better future. While victims and their children have a place to turn in every county and tribe in Wisconsin, there is a need to invest in DV victim services in Wisconsin. **The state must continue to stand up its end of the bargain by investing so that every victim and child in Wisconsin has the opportunity to live free of abuse.**

Abuse has serious financial ramifications. Individuals and businesses bear the costs of health care, lost productivity, and missed opportunities. The costs are reflected in the budgets of law enforcement, the courts, Medicaid, and human assistance agencies at the state and municipal levels. Making even a small investment to assist victims and their children produces significant human and financial advantages. According to economic analysis, every dollar spent on victim assistance saves \$9.25 in property losses, healthcare expenditures, police response, lost productivity, and other costs.<sup>17</sup> **Closing funding gaps for domestic abuse programs is not only the ethical thing to do; it is also the fiscally responsible thing to do.**

Domestic violence victim programs have witnessed a steady growth in demand for services over the last few years but continue to provide lifesaving support to the victims and their children despite mounting hurdles. Sojourner Family Peace Center, for example, is Wisconsin's largest nonprofit provider of domestic violence prevention and intervention services, with approximately 11,800 clients served each year, and offers a variety of services to assist families affected by domestic abuse in achieving safety, justice, and well-being.<sup>18</sup> In order to enhance the well-being and dignity of individuals, families, and close relationships, HELP of Door County offers services and programs to victims of domestic abuse throughout the Door County Peninsula.<sup>19</sup> UNIDOS, a non-profit organization in Fitchburg, WI, exists to empower the community to prevent domestic violence, sexual assault, and promote healthy family systems, and specialize in domestic violence advocacy, sexual assault advocacy, Spanish-language support groups, Spanish-language leadership activities, parenting workshops, and community education/organizing.<sup>20</sup> These programs have been stretched to their breaking point as victims have fewer options for escape, financial sources have dried up, and social service providers are unable to address victims' complex needs. Stable funding for these services is crucial if they are to continue saving the lives of victims and children in Wisconsin. **At the very least, these organizations require consistent funding so that survivors can continue to find sanctuary and protection.**

***Need/Justification Statement:***

1. Sojourner Family Peace Center:
2. HELP of Door County
3. UNIDOS

1. Individuals served: how many DV victims or survivors sought help at your organization before and after the pandemic?

2. Finances: what is your present budget (e.g., income and costs), and how much money do you need to sustain your organization each year? Staffing, salary/benefits, and direct and indirect costs should all be included.

**The State of DV Research and Advocacy in Wisconsin**

**CONCLUSION & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

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