



Legal Aid Society
OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

MAKING JUSTICE REAL

**Testimony on Agency Performance Oversight for the Office of Victim Services
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety Performance**

**Council of the District of Columbia
March 12, 2014, 10:00 a.m.**

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On behalf of the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia,¹ I testify in support of the Office of Victim Services (“OVS”), which provides critical support for survivors of domestic violence in D.C. In particular, we would like to highlight the valuable funding that OVS provides Legal Aid and others that enables us to provide holistic services to survivors at the Domestic Violence Intake Center in Southeast (“DVIC-SE”).

Because of the generous support Legal Aid receives through OVS, we are able to provide critically-needed legal services to low-income domestic violence survivors through our Domestic Violence Intake Center Southeast Project, located in the United Medical Center. My colleagues and I represent survivors of domestic violence not only in civil protection order matters, but often also with their child custody, child support, visitation or divorce/legal separation needs. Many of those who come to the DVIC-SE—and all of our clients—are low-income. The DVIC-SE primarily serves residents from Wards 7 and 8, the two wards with the highest concentration of poverty in the District. Between 2012 and 2013, the number of applicants seeking services at the DVIC-SE increased by twenty percent (20%).

At the DVIC-SE, a survivor can file a petition for a civil protection order and get a temporary protection order, meet with a SAFE advocate, meet with an attorney from Legal Aid, receive assistance from a police officer, and now also meet with a SANE nurse who can document their injuries. Recently, a survivor was brought to the DVIC-SE from the Emergency Room at United Medical Center where her abuser had followed her. This woman had not been able to talk freely to the police officers who had reported to her domestic violence incident, but at the DVIC-SE, she was able to meet again with the police—this time, in a more private setting—and also with an attorney from Legal Aid and a SAFE advocate. She felt comfortable enough to share more about the violence she experienced in this environment. As a result, the woman managed to obtain a temporary protection order, received safety planning, and was able to complete a police report. Without the funding provided by OVS for the DVIC-SE, this

¹ The Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia was formed in 1932 to “provide legal aid and counsel to indigent persons in civil law matters and to encourage measures by which the law may better protect and serve their needs.” For more than 80 years, tens of thousands of the District’s neediest residents have been served by Legal Aid staff and volunteers. Legal Aid currently works in the following four priority areas: consumer, family law, housing, and public benefits. It also maintains an appellate advocacy project that litigates poverty law matters in the D.C. Court of Appeals. More information about Legal Aid can be found on our website, www.LegalAidDC.org, and our blog, www.MakingJusticeReal.org.

particular survivor would not have been able to access all of these holistic and critical services at the same location. The DVIC-SE is an invaluable resource for our rapidly increasing client population because it provides a myriad of services in one location; it is also a venue where survivors can feel comfortable discussing their domestic violence related concerns.

OVS has also demonstrated their support of victims by convening the Victim Assistance Network (“VAN”) which facilitates collaboration between victim service providers to ensure the highest quality client-centered best practices standards for victims’ services.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony and share with you Legal Aid’s positive experiences working with OVS to provide support and services to victims of domestic violence.