From: Erin Passailaigue <operationsdirector@safeinlenoir-greene.org>
Sent: 8/27/2020 11:14:27 AM -0400
To: Rep. Donny Lambeth <Donny.Lambeth@ncleg.gov>
Subject: Coronavirus Funding Request for Domestic Violence

Dear Representative Lambeth,

As the executive director for the domestic violence agency serving Lenoir and Greene Counties, I am reaching out to you today for your support with a Coronavirus relief funding request. Our agency has been slammed with calls for not only protective orders but requests for shelter we are not able to meet due to social distancing requirements. Reduced funding of government grants, a significant drop-off of individual donors, and uncertainty regarding fundraising events has also greatly impacted our agency's ability to maintain services.

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in North Carolina created an additional crisis for victims of domestic violence. Increased isolation because of pandemic conditions, the loss of jobs and resulting financial instability, and the loss of in-person social support and traditional referral networks have left victims sheltering at home with abusers in a climate of increased tension with fewer safety lifelines.

It is difficult to track exact data through our official reporting mechanisms, which were not designed to capture service modifications for remote pandemic conditions. However, in a recent North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence poll, **88% of victim services agencies reported offering new or modified services since the pandemic began**.

Of the domestic violence victim services agencies polled, 75% reported increased calls for services during COVID-19. Many of these agencies reported that the main increase was in crisis-oriented service calls. Of agencies reporting an increase in calls for service, some have reported a **215% increase in calls** after COVID as compared to before.

One of the greatest challenges since COVID-19 his has been providing emergency housing in a safe way during a pandemic. **84%** of agencies polled reported they have begun providing emergency hotel stays as an alternative to their congregant shelters.

- Overall, 44% of agencies with shelters have had to turn away clients due to reduced shelter capacity in response to COVID and limited hotel stay funds. One agency reported turning away as many as 175 clients seeking shelter since the crisis began.
- Survivors are needing more nights of shelter and more financial assistance, on average, than they did prior to COVID.
- Between 14-day quarantine periods before entering shelter and extended hotel/motel stays due to limited shelter capacity, agencies are spending between $1,500 and $6,695 per family for hotel stays. **When serving multiple families, this has amounted to upwards of $50,000 per month of unanticipated costs for ONE agency to house survivors**.

94% of agencies polled report they are experiencing unexpected costs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to hotel/motel stays to enable social distancing and quarantine, agencies have had to pay for PPE supplies, air purification for shelters, extra cleaning supplies – often at a significant markup – hazard pay for staff who are required to provide in-person services, food for the survivors during their hotel stays, high-security technological solutions to provide remote services, and more. Excluding costs for hotel/motel stays, agencies frequently reported having spent $12,000 - $24,000+ on unexpected costs in response to COVID.

Agencies need funds that are flexible and allow for individual adaptation to the needs of their communities. Every agency is different and has access to different community resources. Agencies need to be able to apply the funds to the areas of their own greatest need.

In addition to the numerous unexpected costs, many agencies have been earning significantly less unrestricted income than expected. Most have canceled fundraising events or adapted them to an online platform and all thrift stores were closed during Phase 1. We rely on unrestricted funds to not only match state and government grants but to fund on-going operations. Thrift stores are volunteer-run and have continued to stay closed even in Phase 2. Our victim services grants prohibit the use of grant funding for thrift store employees, so volunteers are a key component to operation. Volunteerism has been down significantly due to the risk of contracting or spreading COVID-19. As compared to their projected income based on previous thrift store sales and past fundraising events, **most agencies surveyed anticipate losing $40,000 - $75,000 by the end of 2020**.

The budget for Domestic Violence Victim Services agencies in North Carolina was cut in 2009, and since that time, the budget line item has not been restored or increased.

In SL 020-80 (HB 1023), the General assembly acknowledged the crisis of COVID-19, but instead of funding existing DV services providers, **they chose to fund a new organization called "Caitlyn's Courage" to pilot an experimental GPS tracking program that will only benefit a small number of survivors in selected pilot program districts**.

In the next round of allocations, **we are asking for Coronavirus Relief Funding to be distributed as a grant-in-aid via the North Carolina Department of Administration**. We are also asking that an equal distribution/amount be awarded to all currently eligible DV Centers designated in Chapter 50B-9, which established the NC Domestic Violence Center Fund.

I appreciate your dedication to the communities you serve. I hope you will support domestic violence agencies across our state by voting to fund coronavirus relief for those on the front lines.

Respectfully,

Erin Passailaigue
Executive Director

SAFE in Lenoir County

Cell: 252-560-4121

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Office Hours: M-F 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Office Location: 2500 N Herritage St, Suite D, Kinston, NC 28501

SAFE in Lenoir County, Inc. is a community organization dedicated to the safety and well-being of domestic violence victims in **Lenoir and Greene Counties.** We are available 24/7/365 on our hotline at **252-523-5573**. We believe education is the key element in ending violence and abuse in our homes and communities.

Funding for this organization is provided by:

North Carolina Department of Safety

North Carolina Department of Administration: Council for Women & Youth Involvement

Lenoir-Greene United Way

City of Kinston

Private Donations & Fundraisers