North Carolina Domestic Violence Commission

NC General Assembly
Legislative Building
16 West Jones St.
Raleigh, NC 27601

June 25, 2020

Dear Honorable Members of the N.C. General Assembly,

Thank you for your important work to serve the citizens of North Carolina. I am writing on behalf of the NC Domestic Violence Commission to present you with the attached position statement concerning one item contained HB 1023, the Coronavirus Relief Fund.

Thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration.

Please let me know if I can provide any additional information.

Respectfully submitted,

April Burgess-Johnson
Chairwoman, NC Domestic Violence Commission
abjohnson@helpmateonline.org
828-707-3052

North Carolina Domestic Violence Commission
Position Statement Regarding $3.5M Funding Allocation

House Bill 1023, the Coronavirus Relief Fund, seeks to provide multiple types of relief to communities impacted by the COVID 19 pandemic. The NC Domestic Violence Commission commends the NC General Assembly for its quick response to this ongoing crisis in our state, and especially for its recognition that victims of domestic violence are in greater danger and have a higher need for safety and support during this crisis. However, we are concerned about the proposed mechanism for delivering relief.

The bill, in its current form, awards $3.5M to Caitlyn's Courage to support a GPS-based offender monitoring pilot program. Caitlyn's Courage is a new nonprofit, developed in 2019 to address the issue of domestic violence. It has not received any awards of public funds to support its work, and has therefore not been subject to ongoing monitoring to ensure that it has the operational capacity to safely and effectively administer a large program and to be good stewards of public monies.

The NC General Assembly established the Domestic Violence Center Fund in 1991, and encoded guidance for its administration in NC General Statute 50-B. This fund supports domestic violence and sexual assault victim services in all 100 counties in NC. These programs provide crisis lines, emergency shelter, court advocacy, counseling, victim support and advocacy services to **60,301** victims of domestic violence each year. The current appropriation to this fund is $4.8 million, an amount which has decreased by approximately 3% since 2015. During the same time the number of victims served by the funded domestic violence centers has risen from 51,074 to over 60,301 last year –a 20% increase.

It is therefore the recommendation of the NC Domestic Violence Commission that the 1023 Coronavirus Relief Act is revised to reallocate the $3.5M in funding to the existing 100+ domestic violence centers, which shall be monitored and administered by the NC Council for Women and Youth Involvement (NCCFWYI). Of these funds, we recommend that 10% be allocated to support prevention programs with documented results along with appropriate oversight and administration, and to hire a Domestic Violence Intervention Program Specialist to monitor performance of state-approved batterer intervention programs in NC, and that the remainder of funds be distributed in equal shares to the domestic violence centers in NC which are experiencing an influx of victims seeking relief during this pandemic.

The NC Domestic Violence Commission exists to advise policy-makers on issues surrounding domestic violence. We are an appointed body, with members selected by the House, the Senate and the Governor.

It is our strong assertion that the approach outlined above will increase victim safety, promote batterer accountability, and ensure good stewardship of public funds.