




**R-14**

**Memorandum**

**To:** Mayor and City Council

**From:** Suja Lowenthal, Second District 

**Subject:** Coordinated Services for Victims of Domestic Violence

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October 11, 2011

**REQUESTED ACTION:**

Respectfully request the opportunity to update the Mayor, City Council and public on the progress of a working group's efforts to secure office space inside the new Los Angeles County Courthouse in support of victims of domestic violence with cooperation from local domestic violence victims' advocate groups, City Prosecutor Doug Haubert and the Long Beach Police Department.

**BACKGROUND:**

Nearly two years ago, I formed a working group made up of local groups who advocate for victims of domestic violence such as Interval House, Women's Shelter of Long Beach, 1736 Family Crisis Center and Sú Casa. In addition, I asked City Prosecutor Doug Haubert, Long Beach Police Department staff and Judge Michael Vicencia to meet with us on a regular basis to discuss the need for a safe and secure space inside the new County courthouse where victims could access multiple services and support in one location.

According to the California Penal Code, domestic violence is defined as ". . . abuse committed against an adult or a minor who is a spouse, former spouse, cohabitant, former cohabitant, or person with whom the suspect has had a child or is having or has had a dating or engagement relationship" (Penal Code section 13700 (b)). Within this definition, abuse is further defined as ". . . intentionally or recklessly causing or attempting to cause bodily injury, or placing another person in reasonable apprehension of imminent serious bodily injury to himself or herself, or another" (Penal Code section 13700(a)). According to the Attorney General's report on crime statistics in California (*Crime in California*), there were 167,087 calls related to domestic violence in 2009, with almost 60% of the cases involving a weapon.

Domestic violence can destroy the fabric of communities by weakening family structures and passing down from generation to generation, dysfunctional and abusive approaches to relationships. In fact, violent juvenile delinquents are four times more likely than other youths to come from homes in which their fathers beat their mothers. (Source: Women's Action Coalition) The damage from domestic violence stretches beyond social structure, affecting school attendance and achievement, workforce productivity and sick time, and healthy pregnancies.

According to LBPD procedures, "the Domestic Violence Detail investigates cases involving physical and sexual assaults that occur within dating, romantic, marital or living together relationships, including same sex relationships. The detail also investigates violations of restraining and protective court orders and stalking as related to the aforementioned relationships. A DV advocate works in conjunction with the detail, to assist victims with temporary emergency shelter and other resources that pertain to victims of domestic violence and their children. There is an on-call detective and a victim advocate available to respond 24-hours a day, when certain criteria are met." For years, the City Prosecutor dedicated as many as 4 Deputy City Prosecutors and the Long Beach Courthouse assigned one judge & courtroom specifically to domestic violence (DV) cases. However, in recent years both commitments have ended with budget cuts, forcing the City Prosecutor and judicial system to do more with less.

As my Council colleagues may know, I have been involved professionally and passionately with domestic violence since 1993, having served as Coordinator of the Domestic Violence Unit in the Los Angeles City Attorney's office. Victims of domestic violence face a daunting path to conviction of an abusive partner, starting with the decision to press charges and continuing with the progression of trial. A number of factors can undermine a victim's fortitude, including the perception that the "family unit" and friendships will be damaged, replacing lost income to pay the bills, and even overtures of change from the abuser. All the while, victims must place their trust in persons unfamiliar to them from the City Prosecutors office and a judicial system that makes it difficult for victims to seek help and "unintentionally wears them down as they travel from location to location seeking services that are scattered through a community or region. They have to tell their story over and over again to officials representing agencies, such as, law enforcement, courts, legal aid, medical, transportation, housing, social services, mental health, rehabilitation, financial assistance, and many more. The criminal justice system unintentionally makes it easy for victims to become frustrated and ultimately stop seeking help." (San Diego Family Justice Alliance)

Helping victims navigate this process are hard working and tremendously supportive DV victims advocates. Notable advocacy groups in Long Beach include the Interval House, Women's Shelter of Long Beach, Su Casa ~ Ending Domestic Violence and 1736 Family Crisis Center. DV victim advocates may be called to the scene, as referenced above, or they may be contacted by the City Prosecutor or victim once charges are filed and a trial is pending. This period of time is considered by DV advocates, the City Prosecutor and LBPD to be critical in reaching a successful verdict because victims need ongoing, coordinated support to build trust, confidence and a sense of safety. Space in the new courthouse will offer victims, DV victim advocates, and City Prosecutors a safe and trusted place to discuss cases and access ongoing services all in one location.

#### FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact to the general fund.