



Supporting Survivors • Strengthening Communities • Empowering Change

Feb 27, 2023

On behalf of My Sisters Place, I am pleased to give testimony about the importance of the funding in the Department of Justice Crime Victim and Survivor Services Division Budget of 10 million to the ODSVS and the Survivor Housing Fund SHF. These fundings are essential for survivors, and often the only and last resource that saves the lives of thousands of victims.

I want to share a story about a survivor that illustrates the importance of this funding; This survivor was experiencing domestic violence at the hands of her partner that was very volatile and dangerous. We got the referral for this survivor through a community partner in law enforcement. She had been trying to break free and escape the relationship, but she and her children had many barriers. This survivor did not speak English and had an illegal immigrant status whereas, her partner, was an American citizen. When we connected with the survivor, she told us that she was very afraid that she would be dead soon, leaving her children alone.

Prior to working with us, she was experiencing high anxiety and a deep depression as the result of all the abuse she had gone through over the last two years, she explained that daily she was the victim of violence. The abuser would spit on her face, was physically/emotionally abusive, and made serious threats often. The recurring threat was to kill her and make her disappear. He would assure her that because she was illegal, he would not have any problem with the police and "his friends" would leave no trace of the crime. Another threat was to deport her every time she didn't accept his sexual advances. She tried several times to make a police report and get help, but the abuser would block her ability to do. He was very connected to the community and found ways of knowing any time she accessed support to cut her options off. She lost all faith in the police and judicial system. She gave up. She fell into deep despair and thought that her life was basically over. That's when she called the community partner in law enforcement and let him know that if something happened to her, it was her husband who did it. This officer called us, and we took the case. We worked strategically with her, safety being her principal need. She was under excruciating surveillance from the abuser. First, we gave her a safe phone. We worked in collaboration with her and our local housing authority, helping her to apply for a Housing Voucher. We helped her documenting and collecting proof of the abuse and Catholic Charities began working on her U Visa. She determined, that due to the extreme safety concerns, our shelter was not an option. We safely planned to provide emergency safe housing and connected with two other shelters that were accessible but at a safer distance away. They remained on high on alert as an option if she needed to flee a greater distance. Without these housing resources, the work that all the agencies put into this case and the help that this survivor has received wouldn't be possible. She reports that without our help, she could have already died in the hands of this very violent abuser and is extremely grateful we are supporting her in through this time.

We receive calls every day from survivors looking for shelter, safe transitional housing and/or resources to flee from hazardous situations. Flexible and supportive funding like this helps us meet the survivors where they are at. We couldn't do this without your help. The work that we do takes the survivors from the absolute darkness of violence to a safe place where they can breathe and see the light of a peaceful life. Often, it only takes one emergency call to our hope line to them to know that somebody cares and will help them in their darkest moment. I hope that you will support the investment of the increase in ODSVS funds. These services save thousands of lives.

Sincerely,

Gia Trejo
Bilingual, Bi Cultural & Sexual Assault Advocate
My Sisters' Place