

BE BRAVE, SPEAK UP

The Quarterly Newsletter of the
Family Violence Law Center's Policy Department



Photographed by Masixole Feni, Langa, South Africa

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To be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.”

- Nelson Mandela

Welcome Message

Domestic violence (DV) has traditionally referred to abusive behavior within the home, typically between intimate partners (commonly known as intimate partner violence, or IPV). However, the term has evolved, with "gender-based violence" (GBV) now widely embraced by professionals to capture a more inclusive understanding of these behaviors. GBV acknowledges that violence is often rooted in power and control, extending beyond intimate relationships and affecting individuals of all gender identities. This shift reflects a broader awareness of violence in society, but the public may not always fully recognize the inclusivity behind this terminology. At its core, GBV speaks to the systemic issues of power, privilege, and oppression that drive such harmful behaviors. However, DV remains a complex issue, encompassing not only physical abuse but emotional, financial, and psychological harm that can often be hidden or normalized in family and caregiving settings.

While many associate DV solely with intimate partner violence, the reality is far more intricate. DV can occur in a variety of relationships beyond romantic ones, including between family members, roommates, or caregivers and their dependents. For instance, caregiver abuse may involve the manipulation or exploitation of resources intended to support vulnerable individuals, such as SSI benefits. In these cases, caregivers may take advantage of their role to financially, emotionally, or physically exploit the person they are supposed to care for. This form of abuse demonstrates the wide-reaching impact of domestic violence, which can target the elderly, disabled, or any individual dependent on another for care.

It's important to approach domestic violence with empathy, recognizing that its forms and victims are as varied as the perpetrators themselves. When we expand our definition of DV beyond intimate partner violence, we uncover the many subtle and overt ways in which power and control are weaponized to harm others. This broader perspective fosters compassion for those experiencing abuse and urges us to seek comprehensive solutions.

At the same time, despite the development of increasingly inclusive definitions of GBV, public focus often remains disproportionately on men's violence against women as the primary or even sole form of GBV. This narrow focus excludes the experiences of gender-nonconforming individuals, the LGBTQ+ community, and violence between men, ultimately limiting our understanding and response to the full spectrum of gendered violence. A narrow view of GBV also risks implying that all women are equally vulnerable to violence, ignoring the intersecting identities—such as disability, migration status, or race—that can dramatically increase an individual's risk.

Our organization's year-long narrative shift campaign seeks to broaden the public's understanding of what constitutes abuse, including under-recognized forms like financial exploitation through the misuse of SSI benefits by caregivers. By highlighting these nuanced and often overlooked forms of violence and exploitation, we aim to foster a more compassionate response, one that encourages prevention, intervention, and support for all survivors. Additionally, by addressing the intersectional factors that shape each individual's experience of abuse, we hope to move beyond narrow, heteronormative frameworks of GBV and create a more inclusive conversation that acknowledges the varied and complex realities of gendered violence.

Nicole Adibi
Policy Associate
Family Violence Law Center

Think Piece: Criminalizing Homelessness

As an advocate for survivors at the intersection of domestic violence and homelessness, I have been disappointed by recent regressive policies and legal decisions. The U.S. Supreme Court's *Grants Pass v. Johnson* decision held that city ordinances prohibiting public camping do not criminalize homelessness status and do not violate the 8th Amendment prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment. The case itself originated in the city of Grants Pass, Oregon, where city laws prohibit camping on public grounds, and it overturned *Martin v. Boise*, in which the Ninth Circuit held that cities could not enforce public camping laws against unhoused persons when the number of homeless people exceeds the number of available shelter beds. *Grants Pass v. Johnson* permits a criminal penalty for public camping despite the *Martin v. Boise* decision. Government agencies holding homeless people criminally liable for not having a place to live, while not providing sufficient housing, feels like an absurd outcome.

Recently, California's Governor Newsom signed Executive Order N-1-24, which orders the removal and closure of encampments that pose an immediate threat to life, health, and safety. The Executive Order does not offer a specific plan to house the people living at those encampments and instead proposes that local governments combine already stretched resources with competitive state grants in order to make this happen. This also feels like an absurd result for the nearly 200,000 homeless individuals in California.

The challenge of homelessness in the U.S. is a multi-faceted issue that requires creativity and compassion. It does not take a rocket scientist to understand the intimate connection between housing affordability and homelessness. Individuals should be able to afford to live where they work, and they should be able to do that with one job. A potential policy solution to the lack of affordable housing is to construct deeply affordable housing in every county and base the number of units constructed on the percentage of SNAP recipients or children receiving free and reduced-price lunch. It is also necessary to exclude those deeply affordable units from the competitive rental market in order to bring the quantity supplied and quantity demanded into alignment with the true cost of housing. However, the first step forward is to reclaim the humanity of the unhoused by decriminalizing homelessness and poverty.

Tunisia Owens
Policy and Advocacy Manager
Family Violence Law Center

FVLC Policy Work and Campaigns

Policy Work: We are excited to announce that Policy Department staff Sadia K. has been accepted into the Solis Policy Institute's (SPI) Sheltering Survivors Cohort. During this fellowship, she will gain hands-on experience drafting a bill that addresses the intersection of domestic violence and homelessness, and her cohort will introduce it to a legislative office. Many of the policy solutions we hope to bring to the SPI team stem from FVLC's Housing First efforts to prevent survivors from becoming homeless. Some ideas we are currently considering include removing credit checks for survivors, allowing the early release of security deposits for survivors needing to break their lease, creating affordable housing units for survivors, and more!

Policy Campaigns:

Freedom to Choose: In June, we wrapped up our research paper titled, *Hidden Costs of Forced Marriage and Its Impacts on Women and Girls Globally*. We also had the opportunity to present our research to an international audience at the Sixth Annual World Conference on Remedies to Racial and Social Inequalities, which took place in South Africa.



University of the Western Cape, as captured by Sadia K. Our staff presented their research on forced marriage at UWC at the 6th annual World Conference on Remedies to Racial and Social Inequalities.

At this conference, we were able to explore policy solutions that local and global entities can pursue in order to combat forced marriage in their communities and ensure support and safety for survivors of forced marriage. We also launched our data collection project to hear directly from survivors of forced marriage and those who escaped attempted forced marriage. Thus far, we have found the lack of resources and support available to survivors to be staggering, but our team remains confident that through our work we will be able to help change direction in California to ensure safety and security for all survivors. To stay up to date on our efforts around this campaign, please follow our social media pages linked at the end of this newsletter.

Legislative Advocacy

Surviving Beyond Bars: An ongoing initiative by our policy department aimed at raising awareness and advocating for legislative reforms that improve conditions within incarceration facilities, with a special focus on the experiences of incarcerated women. Through our Instagram platform @bebravespeakup, we are sharing educational content via reels and infographics. The campaign delves into the various incarceration systems in the U.S., exploring how inmate rights differ depending on the crime committed and the facility assigned. We highlight programmatic offerings available during incarceration and discuss vital rehabilitative and re-entry support systems to aid in reintegration post-sentence. Additionally, we will provide a comprehensive breakdown of the First Step Act of 2018, which includes provisions for compassionate release, particularly for victims of sexual misconduct within the prison system.

FVLC Staff meets with Asm.Wicks' Staff



Our content also tackles the broader societal issues contributing to female incarceration, including childhood trauma, histories of abuse, poverty, and the socioeconomic challenges that often push women into criminal activity. Through this campaign, we aim to deepen public understanding and drive the changes necessary to support incarcerated women and those on their journey to rehabilitation and reintegration.

Bills We are Following :

- **SB-240 (Ochoa Bogh) Surplus State Real Property:** Would authorize a local agency or nonprofit affordable housing sponsor to be considered as a potential priority buyer of surplus state real property upon demonstration that the property is to be used by the agency or sponsor for housing for formerly incarcerated individuals. We are excited to see SB 240 has been signed and chaptered by the Governor!
- **SB-554 (Cortese) Restraining Orders:** Would expressly state that an individual need not be a resident of the State to file a petition for a restraining order and would allow anyone who has faced harassment or violence at the hands of a California resident to file a petition for a restraining order against that person. We are excited to see SB 554 has been signed and chaptered by the Governor!

Advocacy Efforts & Home Cohort

SB575 (Wahab) Underage Marriage: Would (1) close a loophole in the requirement that a local registrar report to the State Registrar on marriages in which one or more party is a minor; (2) require the State Registrar to create a report containing the number of marriage certificates, disaggregated by county, in which one or more party was a minor each year between 2019 and 2024, as specified; and (3) require the State Registrar, upon appropriation, to establish a grant for the purposes of studying extralegal marriages involving minors in the State. SB 575 has signed and chaptered by the Governor!

Advocacy Efforts: Much of our efforts to advance Victims of Crime Act funding were focused on state level lobbying in the spring but over the summer we brought our efforts to the local level. FVLC staff, along with members of the Gender Based Violence Coalition (GBVC), have been working to increase funding to support survivors of gender-based violence here in Alameda County. We began our local meetings with Asm. Bonta, Wicks and Ortega's office as well as the Office of Housing and Homelessness here in Oakland. We will continue to meet with other offices to impress how important this funding gap is to our homeless services system, especially in the aftermath of the Grants Pass decision and California Executive Order N-1-24. Part of our advocacy efforts also include bringing conversations to our community, and we



Children of God by Gary Frier
Castle of Good Hope, South Africa

had the honor of hosting a conversation on System Failures for Survivors and how we can continue uplifting survivors, joined by several local experts. Additionally, we are rounding out this month with one last lobby day in Sacramento to speak about the issue of forced marriage, how it impacts Californians and by offering policy solutions for California to adopt.

HOME Cohort: The HOME Cohort met in Los Angeles to continue building out our campaign efforts to address the intersections of domestic violence and homelessness, seeking ways to continue improving funding opportunities for agencies providing shelters and connecting with law makers and funders.

Upcoming Events

Keep an eye out:

Inform Your Vote 2024 Campaign: Our Inform Your Vote campaign is live on all our social media platforms. Please keep an eye and learn more about how survivors can safely vote from home, what measures and propositions may be on your ballot and more!

Domestic Violence Awareness Month event: Join us in providing a space of healing, crafts and fun for survivors at U.C. Village. This year we're hosting an event to relax, enjoy music and craft our own jewelry with survivors while also learning about available resources within the community to keep our families safe.

Holiday Safety: As the holidays approach we will be launching a guide to staying safe and seeking resources, as holidays can often increase the number of DV incidents.



The Crying for Justice installation by acclaimed local artist and activist Haroon Gunn-Salie, presented on the unmarked site near the historic gallows at the Castle of Good Hope, consists of 118 graves excavated into the landscape, symbolizing the 117 known anti-apartheid martyrs killed in detention by apartheid security forces. The last grave acknowledges activists killed in detention and who remain unaccounted for.

Picture: Haroon Gunn-Saile, Location: Castle of Good Hope, South Africa

Want to help us continue making an impact for survivors in Alameda County?

*Please consider donating to
Family Violence Law Center!*

To donate, click HERE



Founded in 1978, Family Violence Law Center (FVLC) helps diverse communities in Alameda County heal from domestic violence and sexual assault, advocating for justice and healthy relationships. We provide survivor-centered legal and crisis intervention services, offer prevention education for youth and other community members, and engage in policy work to create systemic change.

In court and in our community, every day.

<http://fvlc.org/> * info@fvlc.org * 1.800.947.8301 (24 hrs./day)