

BE BRAVE, SPEAK UP

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



“Love & Protection” by Atlanta, New Orleans-based artist B Mike

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“Believe in yourself and be proud of who you are. Don't let anyone tell you differently.” – June Sarpong

Welcome Message

Schools as Safe Havens? Starting the School Year Amidst Uncertainty

As students and educators begin a new school year, many face challenges under the current federal administration, including unprecedented changes in education and disability funding which threaten the critical support systems that schools provide, especially for students from vulnerable backgrounds.

For countless children, school is not only a place to learn but also a sanctuary from abuse, neglect, and trauma. Counselors, teachers, and staff often serve as the first line of intervention, offering stability, safety, and hope. However, reduced funding limits schools' ability to offer essential services, putting this refuge at risk.

Moreover, heightened fear of immigration enforcement—especially ICE raids—casts a heavy shadow over immigrant and mixed-status families. The criminalization of homelessness and the resource-stripping of the social safety net likewise increase levels of anxiety among students. This stress and uncertainty ripples into classrooms, affecting students' mental health and academic performance. Schools must navigate these complexities while striving to remain inclusive, welcoming spaces where all students can thrive.

Amid these challenges, educators and advocates continue to fight for policies that protect students' rights and well-being. Their resilience is a testament to the power of community in uncertain times.

As this school year begins, we must recognize and support the crucial role schools play in our communities, not just in education but in safeguarding the safety, dignity, and futures of the young people they serve.

Ilah Ross
Policy Intern
Family Violence Law Center

California's Labor Crossroads:

California's Labor Crossroads: Progress, Pressure, and the Politics of Work

California likes to style itself as the vanguard of progressive labor policy. From the \$20 minimum wage for fast-food workers to pioneering farmworker protections, the state has long been a laboratory for laws that ripple outward to the rest of the country. The true picture of life in California is different; beyond the historic wage hikes and pro-union legislation lies a growing tension between worker protections, economic realities, and the politics of governing the world's fifth-largest economy. Yet beneath the headlines of historic wage hikes and pro-union legislation lies a painful contradiction: the protections on paper often fail to reach the workers most vulnerable to exploitation, especially women and survivors of domestic violence.

The state's labor politics are increasingly shaped by two powerful, and sometimes conflicting, forces: organized labor and the tech-driven "gig economy." Their advocacy has delivered paid family leave, expanded overtime rules, and workplace safety standards that far exceed federal requirements. At the same time, technology companies like Uber, Lyft, and DoorDash have poured huge amounts of money to defeat employee protections for gig workers. The Pandemic revealed that female workers and survivors were working in fields that offered the least protections and were at the highest risk for labor exploitation.

Meanwhile, the cost of living, especially housing, has become the great destabilizer of California's labor market. Wage gains, while significant on paper, often fail to keep pace with skyrocketing rents and home prices. A higher minimum wage presents a challenge for workers and business owners who both want to protect their bottom line. Survivors in these lower wage jobs are happy to see the income increase when they can secure housing, but that is unlikely in the larger cities and job centers. The question for policymakers is how to design labor policy that protects workers statewide without accelerating business flight from high-cost regions. Economic insecurity is not just a policy problem; it is a matter of life and death for survivors forced to choose between staying with an abuser or facing homelessness.

Ultimately, California's labor politics reflect a paradox. The state champions bold protections for workers, yet remains home to staggering inequality, unsafe working conditions, and a lack of true economic security for survivors of violence. The challenge now is not just to pass progressive laws, but to ensure those laws translate into real safety, dignity, and independence for the people, especially women and survivors, who keep the state running.

Samual

Policy Intern

Family Violence Law Center

FVLC Policy Work and Campaigns

Policy Work: In Summer 2025, FVLC's Policy Team team drafted comprehensive forced marriage legislation for introduction in the California State Legislature. Working closely with our partners at the Tahirih Justice Center and other coalition partners, we developed legislation that can be presented and defended in the upcoming legislative session. Through these strategic partnerships, our team gained valuable insights into how domestic violence and firearms laws intersect with forced marriage protections. Together, we refined bill language, incorporated suggestions from legal professionals, and identified key areas where the legislation could be strengthened to better serve survivors.

Our team reviewed dozens of California Code sections relating to civil, criminal, and family law. Building on our previous work with AB 1134, this new legislation is strategically designed to adapt existing protective mechanisms within the Civil Code, an approach that reduces potential opposition while maximizing protection for all survivors, regardless of gender identity. The Policy Team, continues to refine bill language as we prepare for the next legislative session, ensuring our proposal maintains



Painted by New York-based street artist Swoon, "Olivia" was painted in 2015 at the corner of 24th and Hampshire Streets

egal coherence while delivering meaningful protection for California's most vulnerable residents.

Right to Exit: Family Violence Law Center joined other local advocates to encourage the Alameda County Board of Supervisors to use Measure W funds to address housing and homelessness in the County. Measure W funds will provide an infusion of cash to service providers severely impacted by federal cuts as the social safety net is eroded. FVLC is also launching a coalition of homeless and gender-based violence service providers to work on creating effective solutions to integrating survivors into the homeless services system.

Bills We are Following:

- SB 608 (Menjivar) Youth Equity + Safety Act
- AB 55 (Bonta) Alternative Birth Center Licensing
- AB 661 (Lee and Schultz) The California Guaranteed Income Statewide
- AB 260 (Aguilar-Curry) Protecting Access to Medication Abortion
- AB 551 (Krell) Reproductive Health Emergency Preparedness Program

Legislative Advocacy

Advocacy Efforts:

In Summer 2025, FVLC staff attended committee hearings in Sacramento relating to AB 1134 Coerced Marriage and AB 878 Reasonable Accommodations for Survivors. Both bills passed through the Assembly with bipartisan support. As the bills came to the Senate, AB 1134 stayed on the consent calendar in both the Public Safety Committee and Judiciary, and AB 878 passed through Judiciary as well. Both bills were sent to Senate appropriations with high fiscal tags, while AB 1134 made it through the committee and we look forward to seeing our bill make it across the Senate floor and off to the Governor's desk.

Unfortunately, AB 878 was held on the suspense file, effectively killing the bill. While we are deeply saddened that AB 878 will not make it to the Senate floor and we are deeply grateful to all our co-sponsors, Women's Foundation California, HOME Cohort, and Californians for Safety and Justice who dedicated their time and efforts to supporting survivors of violence across California, to push groundbreaking legislation forward. Additionally, we are deeply grateful to Assemblymember Ash Kalra for his commitment and dedication to supporting survivors of violence, and his staff Marissa P. who diligently and thoughtfully supported our team throughout the legislative process.



HOME Cohort: The HOME Cohort is looking forward to convening in Oakland this September to continue our statewide advocacy efforts. Many of the HOME Cohort agencies will also be presenting their research at the Continuum of Care Convening later this month. FVLC looks forward to presenting our findings and policy proposal during our workshop on Reforming the PIT Count for Equity, Accuracy and Accountability. Our workshop will investigate how PIT Count practices serve to minimize homelessness data and obscure real need. Drawing on examples from Alameda County and beyond, we will examine the political incentives behind these practices and explore alternatives that are trauma-informed, community-driven, and rooted in racial and gender equity.

FVLC Intern Spotlight

Intern Intros: This summer the Policy department brought on four wonderful interns whose work made a meaningful impact at our agency and beyond!

Caden Woodlander

Caden Woodlander is a Summer Policy Intern at FVLC who supports the Policy Team by handling communication assignments and researching legislation related to systemic reform. As an undergraduate student with strong research and writing skills, Caden is passionate about using policy to address injustice and strengthen the legal protections of our society. He is particularly interested in the intersection of law, privacy, and social equity, and plans to attend law school after completing his degree. Outside of work, Caden enjoys playing guitar, photography, and exploring new hiking spots around the Bay Area.



Grace Summerhill

Grace Summerhill is a Summer Policy Intern who supports FVLC's legislative and advocacy efforts. Her current focus is contributing to a statewide effort to address forced marriage through proposed legislation. Grace is deeply committed to restorative justice, trauma-informed advocacy, and advancing survivor-centered policy solutions. Outside of FVLC, Grace is preparing to begin her legal education at Santa Clara University School of Law in Fall 2025fall. As a first-generation college graduate and longtime public interest advocate, she is committed to continuing her work in community-based legal services and policy reform to ensure equitable access to justice for all.

FVLC Intern Spotlight



Ilah Ross

Ilah Ross is a rising junior at Emory University, where she is double majoring in Creative Writing and Religion. She currently serves as an editorial coach at the Pollen Initiative, a nonprofit that publishes newspapers written by incarcerated individuals. Her work with Spanish-speaking incarcerated writers sparked an interest in the intersection of domestic violence and the criminal justice system—particularly how legal structures can both support and fail survivors. At Emory, Ilah writes for the student newspaper, *The Emory Wheel*, and mentors professional speakers through TEDxEmory, helping them shape compelling, socially engaged narratives. As a Summer Policy Intern at FVLC, she is eager to deepen her understanding of how law and policy can be used as tools for survivor-centered justice.

Samuel Babanezhad

Samuel Babanezhad is a Summer Policy Intern and is a rising fourth-year at UCLA studying political science. He was drawn to FVLC's Policy Team because of its focus on creating systemic change that can positively impact vulnerable communities on a broad scale. At the same time, he was eager to work with FVLC to gain hands-on experience supporting survivors and understanding how laws affect them in practice. This role offered him the opportunity to understand how to bridge policy work with direct client advocacy, deepening his perspective on how legal systems can better protect families and individuals experiencing violence.



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)