

**2024 REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE WORKING GROUP ON
RESOURCE COORDINATION TO SUPPORT VICTIMS OF SEXUAL
EXPLOITATION, VIOLENCE, AND DOMESTIC ABUSE**



Background

The Working Group on Resource Coordination to Support Victims of Sexual Exploitation, Violence, and Domestic Abuse was established by Baltimore County Executive Johnny Olszewski, Jr. on November 28, 2023 to make recommendations to bolster Baltimore County’s ongoing efforts to support survivors of sexual and domestic violence and to prevent incidents from occurring in the first place.

The membership of the Working Group includes a diverse group of government representatives, local stakeholders, and community leaders:

- **Rebecca Allyn**, Victim Services Manager, Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy
- **Roz Berkowitz**, Baltimore County Commission for Women
- **Michelle Bernstein**, Grants Assistant, Baltimore County Office of Budget and Finance
- **Alicia Bickoff**, Deputy Director, CHANA
- **Amy Blank**, Baltimore County Commission for Women
- **Hon. Katie Curran O’Malley**, Chief Executive Director, Women’s Law Center of Maryland
- **Dana Cala**, Victim Advocacy Supervisor, Baltimore County Child Advocacy Center
- **Laura Clary**, Director of the SAFE and DV Program, GBMC
- **Shelby Frink**, Executive Director, Family Crisis Center
- **Shelly Hettleman**, Maryland State Senator, District 11
- **Robert McCullough**, Chief, Baltimore County Police Department

- **Mark Millspaugh**, Deputy Director for Social Service, Baltimore County Health and Human Services
- **Lisa Nitsch**, Director of Training & Education, House of Ruth Maryland
- **Yuvelqui Rattigan**, Director of Clinical Services, Center for Hope
- **Amanda Rodriguez**, Executive Director, TurnAround, Inc.
- **Janine Scott**, Chief Attorney, Baltimore County Office of Maryland Legal Aid
- **Scott Shellenberger**, State’s Attorney, Baltimore County
- **Krista Trahan**, Co-Director, Baltimore County Child Advocacy Center
- **Giuliana Valencia-Banks**, Chief of Immigrant Affairs, Baltimore County
- **Jennifer White Holland**, Maryland State Delegate, District 10
- **Pat Young**, Baltimore County Councilman, District 1

Henry Callegary, Senior Coordination Manager for Public Safety and Accountability for Baltimore County, provides administrative support and coordinates the Working Group meetings.

Meetings

The Working Group’s first meeting was held on December 14, 2023, and focused on the goals of the Working Group and challenges for providers of services for survivors of sexual and domestic violence emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic. Subsequent meetings addressed the housing challenges for survivors of sexual and domestic violence, the protective/peace order process, challenges facing educational institutions in Baltimore County, domestic violence data from the Baltimore County Police Department, and a review of data collected by service providers. Links to the meeting agendas, notes, and recordings, are below:

Meeting Data	Agenda	Meeting Notes	Recording
December 14, 2023	Agenda	Notes	Recording
February 16, 2024	Agenda	Notes	Recording
April 17, 2024	Agenda	Notes	Recording
June 28, 2024	Agenda	Notes	Recording
October 7, 2024	Agenda	Notes	Recording

Additional meeting information, including links to presentations, can be found at the Working Group’s website: <https://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/departments/county-executive/working-group-resource-coordination-support-victims-sexual>

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Working Group on Resource Coordination to Support Victims of Sexual Exploitation, Violence, and Domestic Abuse presents the following policy recommendations based on the discussions and presentations during the 2023-2024 meetings. These recommendations are not an exhaustive list of potential improvements in resource coordination, but provide a starting point for improving outcomes for survivors of sexual exploitation, violence, and domestic abuse.

Recommendation 1: Baltimore County should continue to collaborate with providers and the private sector to expand access to affordable housing and shelter for survivors.

Lack of affordable short-term shelter and long-term housing remains a serious issue for survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Numerous providers identified this issue as their chief concern at the Working Group's first meeting on December 14, 2023. In the Working Group's February 16, 2024 meeting, Terry Hickey, Director of the Department of Housing and Community Development, presented on the Department's efforts to expand access to affordable housing for both long-term and short-term needs. The ensuing discussion identified that many survivors are forced to return to their abuser's residence due to a lack of financial independence and the high cost of housing in Baltimore County, which is partially driven by a lack of new construction and units.

Based on these discussions, the Working Group on Resource Coordination to Support Victims of Sexual Exploitation, Violence, and Domestic Abuse recommends that the Baltimore County Executive and County Council work to expand access to affordable short-term and long-term housing for survivors by developing additional housing units and increasing the supply of affordable housing in Baltimore County. Specifically, Baltimore County should work with state and federal agencies to secure funding for affordable housing, continue to utilize public-private partnerships to incentivize construction, and collaborate with local hotels to expand the number of beds available for survivors. Additionally, conversations surrounding housing policy should take into account the specific concerns and needs of survivors. Lawmakers should ensure that there is adequate shelter space for survivors, that additional resources are allocated towards addressing public safety and poverty in the communities where new construction is occurring, as well as considering policies that would prioritize individuals attempting to leave abusive relationships and who lack a place to go. Finally, the Working Group recognizes that securing affordable housing is only one aspect of ensuring financial independence for survivors, and there remains a pressing need to expand services to ensure that survivors have the ability to secure services and employment to obtain adequate economic opportunity and independence.

Recommendation 2: Law enforcement, providers, and Baltimore County government, should increase their support of multilingual and cultural competency efforts to serve Baltimore County's diverse communities.

Baltimore County is an increasingly diverse jurisdiction. Over 12% of the County's population are immigrants, and within that group there is a large amount of diversity. For instance, 22% of the immigrants living in Baltimore County immigrated from Mexico, Central,

America, and the Caribbean, 19% came from India and Southwest Asia, 12% came from West Africa, 9% from East Africa, and 7% from Southeast Asia. This rich diversity is a strength for Baltimore County, but also presents a number of challenges in ensuring that all County residents, regardless of origin, are able to effectively seek out necessary services.

The Working Group identified that cultural competency on the part of providers, law enforcement, and Baltimore County government is a necessity given the County's changing demographics. The Working Group recommends that these groups take steps to expand multilingual service options, expand capacity for existing providers, provide culturally attuned services that recognize the barriers and specific concerns of the numerous immigrant communities in Baltimore County, and place a greater focus on cultural competency in order to ensure that the needs of all Baltimore County residents are met, and to bridge cultural barriers on issues like domestic and sexual violence. Additionally, steps should be taken within organizations and Baltimore County government to ensure that the deaf and hard of hearing community has equal access to services. These recommendations may require hiring additional staff, and providing additional trainings, to ensure that providers and Baltimore County government are able to meet the needs of our increasingly diverse constituents.

Recommendation 3: Baltimore County should create a web-page for survivors of sexual exploitation, violence, and domestic abuse that provides a step-by-step guide to the legal process and provides descriptions and links to the various providers in Baltimore County

One of the major challenges for survivors of sexual exploitation, violence, and domestic abuse is the lack of a clear overview of the legal processes and where to find support online. The Working Group recommends that Baltimore County develop a web-page on the main Baltimore County government website which provides a list of service providers, their addresses, links to their websites, and a brief description of the services that they provide. Additionally, this web-page should provide a straight-forward guide to the process for obtaining a protective/peace order, and a description of the process for pressing criminal charges against an abuser. Providing such information in a "one-stop-shop" will help ensure that survivors are provided clear guidance and direction when seeking out services and considering whether to reach-out to law enforcement. Having these resources available on a single web-page will also help prevent confusion by members of the public in what can be a stressful and challenging time.

CONCLUSION AND GOALS FOR 2025

The first year of the Working Group on Resource Coordination to Support Victims of Sexual Exploitation, Violence, and Domestic Abuse has produced positive progress towards addressing the needs of survivors in Baltimore County. The Working Group's early focus has been on identifying the challenges facing survivors, and establishing a baseline based on the data from providers and law enforcement. The recommendations of the Working Group represent first steps towards better addressing the needs of survivors in Baltimore County. Looking ahead to 2025, the Working Group will continue to meet regularly to receive updated reports from providers and law enforcement, and will expand its focus to include areas such as ensuring voices from the immigrant community in Baltimore are heard, and to communicate and

cooperate with neighboring jurisdictions, among other areas. The Working Group intends to explore social determinants that are the root causes of sexual exploitation, violence, and domestic abuse, and to discuss and formulate policies to address these causes. The goal for the Working Group moving forward is to continue to develop proposals to best address the needs of the people of Baltimore County in this crucial area, and to make tangible progress towards reducing instances of sexual exploitation, violence, and domestic abuse.