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Honorable Members of the City Council
City of Los Angeles
c/o City Clerk, City Hall
200 N. Spring Street
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Attention: Heleen Ramirez
Legislative Coordinator

Attention: Eric Villanueva
Legislative Assistant

COUNCIL TRANSMITTAL: LOS ANGELES HOUSING + COMMUNITY INVESTMENT DEPARTMENT REPORT ON ACTIONS TAKEN TO PROVIDE PROTECTIONS FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS DURING THE SAFER AT HOME ORDER.

SUMMARY

Per City Council File No. 20-0489 adopted on May 6, 2020, the Los Angeles Housing + Community Investment Department (HCIDLA) was instructed to report on the actions taken to provide increased protections for victims of Domestic Violence, including undocumented immigrants during the Safer at Home Order. This report summarizes current efforts in the City Los Angeles, primarily led by the Mayor's Office of Public Safety with the support of the Mayor's Fund for Los Angeles and in collaboration with HCIDLA.

The impact of the Stay at Home order issued March 19, 2020 with respect to victims of domestic violence, both sheltered and those seeking to be sheltered continues to be of unprecedented concern. HCIDLA has maintained regular communication with the City's Domestic Violence/Human Trafficking Shelter Operators (DV/HTSO) to better understand the increased challenges survivors are facing due to COVID-19. DV/HTSO agencies have reported the following issues unique to DV/HT survivors since the Safer at Home order was issued:

- Current DV/HT clients who were working towards exiting shelter with income from jobs were delayed due to lay-offs;
- Exited DV/HT clients wanted to return to shelter due to job loss;
- Childcare is nearly impossible to secure, making exiting plans even harder and resulting in families staying longer in shelters;
- Since shelters are not turning over as quickly, DV/HT shelter agencies were not able to accept new families causing approximately 80-90 survivors being turned away each week;
- Survivors seeking support are too afraid to enter into communal living spaces due to the virus. Many survivors are turning down going into shelter unless they are assured they will be in a unit with a private bathroom and kitchen; and
- Many of the DV/HT shelter agencies relied on the funding secured for Project Safe Haven when capacity was met or isolation was needed to prevent the spread.

This pandemic has subsequently and exponentially triggered a myriad of health, economic, and safety challenges for survivors. Although federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and City General Fund dollars are allocated to Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking agencies on an annual basis, COVID-19 Federal Relief Funds are needed in order to continue housing DV/HT victims actively fleeing violence and unable to be housed within existing DV/HT shelters due to limited shelter beds. These funds also help control the spread of COVID-19 and avoid displacement and homelessness among this population. The City funds DV/HT shelters to house survivors at their shelter facilities. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a distinct crisis for victims of domestic violence. In essence, they are being quarantined with their abusers. Victims fleeing domestic violence are not able to be housed at shelter agencies, both due to limited capacity and risk of COVID exposure. Before COVID, City-funded shelters were already at capacity and also offer communal living spaces which is not desirable in this COVID environment. In order to control the spread, the shelter communal living spaces are not safe, for both the clients and shelter staff. For this reason, clients require separate housing and the only available option has and continues to be hotels and motels. If allocated, COVID-19 Federal Relief Funds will be used for the sole purpose of supporting the hotel and motel costs associated with Project Safe Haven and the additional operating costs incurred by the participating DV/HT agencies. The challenges DV/HT survivors are experiencing due to COVID-19 are grave and require immediate action. The funds raised by the Mayor's Fund for Los Angeles are set to expire on August 31, 2020. The COVID-19 Federal Relief Funds provide both an eligible and available use of funding to continue supporting DV/HT survivors housed in hotels and motels. Over 1,200 survivors, many of which are single mothers with children, will be displaced if no additional funds are allocated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the City Council, subject to the approval of the Mayor:

- A. INSTRUCT the CAO and CLA to allocate \$4,897,227.34 from the COVID-19 Federal Relief Fund to continue Project Safe Haven through December 30, 2020;
- B. INSTRUCT HCIDLA to execute new agreements with the following agencies to continue Project Safe Haven for the period of September 1, 2020 to December 30, 2020:

Jenesse Center Inc.	\$ 241,724.41
Coalition to Abolish Sex Trafficking and Slavery (CAST)	\$ 151,117.47
Rainbow Services Ltd.	\$ 99,341.90
Su Casa- Ending Domestic Violence	\$ 129,600.00
East LA Women's Center (ELAWC)	\$ 196,135.56
Peace Over Violence	\$ 87,308.00
CSUN Foundation dba Strength United	\$ 17,000.00
Haven Hills Inc.	\$ 105,000.00
The People Concern	\$ 8,000.00
1736 Family Crisis Center	\$ 12,000.00
Center for the Pacific Asian Family (CPAF)	\$ 70,000.00
Total	\$ 1,117,227.34

- C. AUTHORIZE HCIDLA to enact City Charter Section 371, which provides an exception from competitive bidding if the contracted improvements and/or services are of urgent necessity for the preservation of life, health or property. HCIDLA will execute a sole source contract with Su Casa-Ending Domestic Violence, East LA’s Women’s Center, and Peace Over Violence, which are not currently contracted by the City to continue to provide services to Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking survivors for the period of September 1, 2020 to December 30, 2020 as part of Project Safe Haven;
- D. AUTHORIZE the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), with the assistance of the City Attorney, to designate a lead department to execute the necessary agreements with participating hotels and motels as part of Project Safe Haven;
- E. AUTHORIZE the Controller to establish new accounts within the COVID-19 Federal Relief Fund No. 63M and appropriate \$4,897,227.34 as follows:

Account No.	Account Name	Amount
43T910	Project Safe Haven - Agencies	\$ 1,117,227.34
TBD	Project Safe Haven – Hotels/Motels	3,780,000.00
Total		\$ 4,897,227.34

- F. AUTHORIZE the General Manager of HCIDLA, or designee, to prepare any Controller’s instructions needed to implement actions approved by the Council and Mayor on matters presented in or deriving from this transmittal, and/or to make necessary technical adjustments, subject to the approval of the City Administrative Officer; and further, request that the Controller implement the instructions.

BACKGROUND

Managed by HCIDLA, the Domestic Violence/Human Trafficking Shelter Operations (DV/HTSO) program brings together 17 domestic violence and human trafficking shelters in the City to provide emergency and transitional shelter and wraparound services for survivors. Shelters provide housing and services to continue the support for survivors and ease them into independent living. The DV/HTSO program emphasizes a trauma-informed approach and places a large emphasis on safety and housing outcomes. Safety planning is the most essential service provided across all agencies for all survivors—including those that call in but determine that shelter is not the right step for them at the moment. Other services offered range from legal assistance with a child custody case to securing public benefits for eligible parents with children and single individuals.

As it relates to COVID-19 and Safer at Home orders, we must keep in mind that “home” is typically an unsafe place for survivors and their children. When home is dangerous, a robust safety net of supports should be there to protect survivors from further harm. As social distancing and isolation increase, so too does the risk of domestic violence, and the challenges of providing services. Despite these challenges, programs remain available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to assist those in need. Our funded agencies have seen an unprecedented spike in calls made to the DV hotline. As of March 22, 2020 through August 1, 2020, DV agencies have responded to 29,970 calls while LAPD reported 16,466 DV-related calls for the same period.

On July 15, 2020, HCIDLA released a transmittal to the Mayor (C.F. No. 20-0044 and 20-0417) requesting authority to allocate CSBG CARES Act supplemental funding to DV/HT agencies. If approved, these funds will provide increased support to the growing demands placed on the Domestic Violence/Human Trafficking shelter agencies funded by HCIDLA and respond to a gap in resources during this challenging time. This funding however, will not be sufficient to support the existing COVID-19 DV/HT Hotel Program- Project Safe Haven.

Project Safe Haven

Led by the Mayor’s office and the Mayor’s Fund for Los Angeles, and in coordination with HCIDLA, LAPD, Office of the City Attorney, LA County Department of Public Health, and the Domestic Violence Alliance, Project Safe Haven was implemented to secure hotel rooms for Angelenos who were not safe in their homes due to domestic violence but needed to remain sheltered and be protected from the spread of Coronavirus.

Children being home from school, financial insecurity, isolation, and an inability to utilize normal coping mechanisms due to limited mobility are some of the factors that caused a spike in DV related crime. Prior to COVID-19, the current DV shelter capacity was full and as previously stated, ‘shelter in place’ orders

limit traditional exit options for survivors reducing turnover and limiting intake of new victims. When the Safer at Home Order was first implemented, Domestic Violence Shelter organizations were turning away 90 victims per week due to lack of shelter beds across Los Angeles County.

Project Safe Haven has provided an opportunity for the hospitality industry to step up and save lives. The opportunity to house survivors and their children gives hotels a chance to convert its values of welcoming and serving people into a life-saving endeavor. Recognizing how hard the crisis has been for this sector, the program also offers economic relief for the hotels who participate through these business transactions. The Mayor's Fund for Los Angeles, using their 501(c)3 status, executed an Operating Agreement with each participating hotel for up to a five-month period, with options to extend. The hotel's services, among others, included check-in / desk service, and security services. All of the hotels were apartment style with full kitchens, living area's and separate bedrooms to provide safety and comfort for the extended stays. As this program seeks to transition under the purview of the City, HCIDLA recommends that the Mayor and City Council authorize the General Services Department (GSD) to serve as the lead negotiator for the execution of agreements with participating hotels and motels as part of the Project Safe Haven. GSD provided similar support with the implementation of Project Roomkey.

The Mayor's Fund also executed agreements with MasterCard to offer a weekly food stipend to all hotel guests via a prepaid debit card. The City also assigned Disaster Service Workers to conduct weekly room inspections to ensure the integrity of the rooms. Agreements were also executed with 10 DV/HT agencies to assess for safety with the client and develop a safety plan, assess for preliminary needs (clothes, formula, diapers, etc.) and determine existing resources, connect and refer clients with existing resources (Department of Public Social Services (DPSS), Unemployment Insurance, CalWORKs, etc., perform daily health checks via phone, assist with legal services, provide therapy via telehealth, and develop exit plans with each client not eligible for permanent housing support.

To date Project Safe Haven has supported 1,268 people since its inception on April 20th. For perspective the entire Los Angeles County DV/HT shelter system contains around 1000 beds. The total cost of Project Safe Haven was \$6 million dollars, all raised through philanthropic donations. This includes \$600,000 allocated to permanent housing support for 30% of the households in the program. It was determined that 30% of the households would be able to sustain permanent housing after six months of support through surveys with the DV/HT agencies where they indicated how many of their clients were currently employed or would be employed within six months of the City re-opening. This funding is designed to mimic the Housing First flexible funding model that has been researched and found to be a successful mode of supporting DV/HT survivors obtain permanent housing. The cost to continue Project Safe Haven through the remainder of the calendar year is \$4.9 million. This amount would cover hotel lodging costs, food, and funding for participating DV/HT agencies. It is critical that we identify funding to continue the support for survivors of DV/HT because not only are we still experiencing the fears and public health risks associated with COVID-19, but we continue to see a rise in the number of survivors reaching out for support, consistently receiving over 2,000 calls a week in the month since July.

Further, limited mobility, a lack of ability to utilize regular coping skills, and the stress caused by financial and health insecurity have increased the level of violence that we have seen inflicted on the clients enrolled in Project Safe Haven.

One of the participating DV agencies recently shared that for the most part, in the days before COVID-19, the extent of injuries suffered by DV clients were along the lines of black eyes, neck rings (bruising due to strangulation), and bruises on the legs and arms. Unfortunately, clients entering our emergency program (post COVID-19) have endured a magnified level of viciousness that is showing a new low for depravity and degradation. This is a brief overview of the trauma some of the clients we are serving have experienced:

- One client had 19 staples on the face as a result of a head injury;
- One client was run over with a car. She said, “the flesh broke away from my bones” ...she also has a broken foot;
- One client had to have repeated ultrasounds. Her abuser kicked her 17 times in her stomach.... he was wearing boots;
- One client had broken ribs;
- One client’s boyfriend stuck her head out of an open window and slammed it on her neck;
- One client said “my eyeball came out” and had to be reinserted;
- One client had a broken arm.
- One staff member stated, “It seems like the injuries get worse every day!”

Support for Undocumented Victims of Domestic Violence

The City’s DV/HTSO program was designed to support all survivors regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or immigration status. No client is asked of their status or to provide social security information or disclose immigration status. The same guidelines were applied to Project Safe Haven. Clients are never asked to provide personal information or identification card upon hotel check-in or throughout their stay. Each client checked into the hotel under an alias to preserve confidentiality and ensure that there was no way to tell a person’s immigration status. Additionally, for Project Safe Haven, outreach was done through local ethnic media outlets, Spanish and Korean grocers associations, and the LA Times in an effort to inform the public that this resource was available to them regardless of immigration status and there was no cross reporting with any federal agency.

FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

There is no fiscal impact to the General Fund associated with this report.

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