



FIFTH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

PRESS RELEASE

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Legislature Approves Funding to Restore Police Precinct Domestic Violence Caseworkers

Legislators Hahn, Browning, Martinez, Cilmi and Anker work with Bellone to save supportive services for domestic violence victims

Riverhead, NY - The Suffolk County Legislature this week approved a budget amendment that will restore the positions of three Domestic Violence Outreach Precinct Project caseworkers laid off earlier this year due to a loss of funding. In mid-March, Long Island Against Domestic Violence (LIADV), the not-for-profit organization that provides domestic violence victim caseworkers within Suffolk's police precincts and courts, was forced to eliminate four positions from its Advocacy Program after a federal grant was lost, leaving a deficit between what the County had allocated for the program in 2015 and its actual operating cost. In May, the agency was able to rehire one of the four laid-off caseworkers after it received a grant through a private foundation to support its outreach program. Under the bill sponsored by Legislators Kara Hahn (D-Setauket), Kate Browning (WFP- Shirley), Monica Martinez (D- Brentwood), Tom Cilmi (R-East Islip) and Sarah Anker (D-Mount Sinai), the remaining positions will be restored and funded for the rest of this year through the elimination of a vacant "planner" position within the Department of Probation. Budget officials have found that this will not have a financial impact the County's budget.

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“Once a victim escapes a violent situation, his or her ordeal is not over. In the aftermath of a domestic violence incident, there are physical, mental, financial and legal concerns that need to be handled. This is where the Domestic Violence Outreach Precinct Project plays an essential role in providing support services that allow for victims to deal with both these lingering issues and rebuild his or her life,” said Legislator Hahn. “I look forward to County Executive Bellone continuing his commitment to this program and find a way to keep these critical services available to victims of domestic violence in 2016 and years to come.”

“I applaud Legislator Hahn for her leadership on behalf of domestic violence victims and I am glad we found a fiscally responsible way to restore these caseworker positions after losing federal funding,” Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone said. “Now that Suffolk County has demonstrated the importance of these positions by making up for the loss of federal funds this year, I hope that encourages the federal government to restore the grant to fund Precinct Advocate caseworkers. We need to do all we can to ensure that victims of domestic violence have access to the resources and services needed to live safe and productive lives.”

LIADV, formerly the Suffolk County Coalition Against Domestic Violence, has been providing Precinct Advocacy Services for over twenty six years. The primary purpose of this program is to assure that personal contact with an advocate occurs as soon as possible for victims of domestic violence following an incident. To accomplish this, LIADV places victims’ advocates in each of the Suffolk County Police Department precincts. Advocates work in tandem with law enforcement, to provide victims with crisis intervention services, extensive safety assessments, safety planning, information on protections available to them under the law, panic alarm installation in their home and access to the Safe Harbor Shelter. Additionally, LIADV accompanies victims during court proceedings, and while accessing other services provided by the agency and its community partners.

When LIADV lost the funding for this part of its outreach services, agency leaders made a strategic decision to shift some of its funding from Court Advocacy to the Precinct Advocacy

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Program. In doing so, it was still able to assist individuals in court, but had to limit the number of new cases that could be referred directly from the courts. The County's budget amendment will provide the funding to reverse that limitation.

"I want to thank Legislator Hahn for her leadership and commitment to find the offset to keep advocates in the precincts for the remainder of the year," said Legislator Browning, chair of the Legislature's Public Safety Committee. "It is crucial in the upcoming operating budget process for the administration and the Legislature to provide the necessary funding for advocates in our precincts for future years. "

Legislator Martinez echoed that sentiment saying, "Domestic violence not only affects the individual but those around them. I want to thank Legislator Hahn for her commitment in protecting the families of Suffolk County and ensuring funding was restored. We need to provide necessary resources which will allow victims and families of domestic violence to recover from its affects and to be able to live in a world without fear."

Colleen Merlo, Executive Director, offered "thanks to Legislator Kara Hahn and her co-sponsors, Legislators Kate Browning, Monica Martinez, Tom Cilmi and Sarah Anker for their leadership and advocacy around the need for strong, and County funded domestic violence services. I am eager to work with our staff and the Suffolk County Police Department to bring this vital and effective program back to full capacity, so that we can meet the need in every community."

"It is a moral obligation of our government to do whatever we can to protect victims, be it a child, a spouse or an elder from verbal, emotional or physical abuse," said Legislator Cilmi. "Unfortunately domestic violence continues to be pervasive throughout Suffolk County. This funding will provide much needed support to an organization which has been on the front lines serving victims of domestic violence for years."

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Legislator Anker concluded by saying, "Domestic violence is increasing in our county, and local outreach is critical during times of crisis. I want to thank the legislature for approving the restored funding for this life saving program, as well as LIADV for their commitment in providing victims with support and guidance during their time of crisis."

The bill now goes to County Executive Steve Bellone who is expected to sign the amendment within the coming days.

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