



Issue: Criminal Background Checks

Position Statement:

The Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance opposes the use of criminal background checks on victims of sexual and/or domestic violence as a prerequisite for obtaining shelter or any other services offered by Sexual and Domestic Violence Agencies.

Rationale:

Sexual and domestic violence is linked to other forms of oppression, which disproportionately affect women, children, and other marginalized people. The Action Alliance is committed to addressing racism, as well as other forms of oppression, as an essential component of our work.

Policies that limit access to services based on criminal history are inherently racist and result in a greater proportion of women of color being blocked from accessing shelters and other services. Such policies are not consistent with the Action Alliance's belief that ALL people have the right to a life free of violence or our efforts to address oppression.

Policies requiring such checks fail to take into account the following:

- Victims of domestic violence are frequently subject to cross warrants, mutual orders of protection, and arrest and conviction for acts of self defense.
- Victims of domestic and/or sexual violence with criminal histories are entitled to safety and advocacy services, as are their children.
- It is not uncommon for victims to have been forced, threatened, or coerced to commit crimes by the abuser/perpetrator as a way to maintain power and control.
- The process of conducting criminal background checks poses a risk to the confidentiality and a delay in delivery of services. Both are unacceptable.

Criminal background checks do not promote the safety of victims of domestic violence and sexual violence and, in fact such checks may put them in greater danger.

For these reasons, the Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance opposes the use of criminal background checks on victims of sexual and/or domestic violence as prerequisite for obtaining shelter or any other services offered by Sexual and Domestic Violence Agencies.