



SEXUAL & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS ON THE RISE

In Virginia, we have seen the requests for sexual and domestic violence services, including emergency shelter, drastically increase as a direct result of COVID-19 pandemic.

Stay-at-home orders and closures designed to protect the public from widespread infection left many survivors and families isolated or trapped at home with their abusers.

Beginning in March, Virginia's Statewide Hotline saw a **73% increase in contacts** while over half of Virginia's sexual and domestic violence agencies (SDVAs) reported an increase in demand for services and **87% reported significant shifts in work** to address the complex and ongoing housing, financial, and safety needs during the pandemic.

Increased job loss has resulted in more survivors becoming financially entangled with their abusers while safe and affordable housing remains in short supply in many communities.

Requests for emergency shelter have increased dramatically, with one agency reporting an **150% increase in the number of families and survivors living in their shelter** as compared to the previous year. For a majority of SDVAs, this upward trend is continuing into the Winter.

More teens and young adults are requesting sexual and domestic violence services than ever before.

As virtual classes began in the Fall, hotlines across the state received **23% more contacts and requests for services from survivors who are under the age of 24.**

Upward trends in overall hotline contacts have turned into significant increases in the number of survivors receiving face-to-face crisis intervention, advocacy, and counseling services; in some communities, **these increases reflect literally thousands more being served in 2020 in comparison to 2019.**

BUT WE CAN REVERSE THESE TRENDS....

.... IT'S TIME TO INVEST IN PREVENTION

Now, more than ever, funding for sexual and domestic violence prevention work is urgently needed to counteract the effects of the pandemic and to undo family and community risk factors for violence.

Sexual and domestic violence prevention programs use evidence informed, public health strategies to build safety and wellbeing for their communities by:

- ✓ **Strengthening** local economic supports for families.
- ✓ **Educating parents and adults** on how to teach consent, model respect, and create pathways for youth leadership and healthy child development.
- ✓ **Teaching young people** how to build healthy relationships, create positive norms around gender, sexuality, and identity, and build social emotional skills, like empathy and communication.
- ✓ **Building multi-disciplinary community coalitions** to make neighborhoods, schools, places of worship, and communities healthy and safe.
- ✓ **Facilitating connection** for community leaders, families, and young people to access resources, to solve community problems, and to build safety and support networks during the pandemic (and beyond).

Currently, the Commonwealth invests \$0 toward the important goal of preventing sexual and domestic violence through primary prevention efforts like these. And with limited federal funds, only 16 out of our 65 SDVAs can engage in this life-saving work in their communities.

What are we asking for?

- ✓ **Restore crucial investments** to the prevention fund by reallocating the original \$1.5 million per biennium, or \$750k annually, **for these life-saving efforts.**

Every Virginian has a right to food, housing, quality education, healthcare, a living wage, and **safety from violence**. This is the foundation for a healthy, thriving future for all. Prevention programs, led by Virginia's SDVAs, are the cornerstones for ensuring community-wide health and resilience.

#FundPrevention - fund our future!