



**FUTURES WITHOUT VIOLENCE**

**ECONOMIC SECURITY FOR SURVIVORS OF  
DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE:**

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CASH  
ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS**

---

JANUARY 2021



# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Overview of Existing Programs That Serve Survivors</b> .....	2
Federal Cash Assistance Programs.....	2
Oregon’s Comprehensive, Survivor-Centered Plan with Cash Assistance.....	3
Community-Based Organizations’ Flexible Funding for Housing Stability.....	6
FreeFrom Safety Fund.....	9
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	10
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	13

# Introduction

The Biden-Harris Administration has set forth a promising, comprehensive, and achievable plan to address and end violence against women.<sup>1</sup> One of the key elements of the plan aims to strengthen social supports for survivors of domestic violence (DV) and sexual assault (SA) to help them achieve safety and economic security and recover from trauma and abuse.

The Administration has highlighted six actions to strengthen social supports for survivors of DV and SA. These include: (1) establishing a new coordinated housing initiative to meet the needs of survivors; (2) expanding access to housing assistance through VAWA housing provisions; (3) protecting survivors from housing discrimination; **(4) providing cash assistance to survivors to build safety and security**; (5) allowing survivors to access retirement savings as they rebuild their lives; and, (6) guaranteeing paid safe leave<sup>2</sup> for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

This paper addresses the fourth action – **providing cash assistance to survivors to enhance survivors’ safety, stability, and economic security**. Below is a summary of the existing federal, state, and non-profit cash assistance programs and how they address the short-term emergency needs of survivors. Recommendations on how these programs can be reimagined, strengthened, and scaled are also set forth below.

## OVERVIEW OF EXISTING PROGRAMS THAT SERVE SURVIVORS

### Federal Cash Assistance Programs

Survivors of domestic violence generally have only one option for cash assistance. They can apply for **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)**, a federal program administered by the states to help needy families achieve self-sufficiency. (In rare cases, they can apply for State General Assistance, a completely state-funded program).<sup>3</sup> With TANF, states receive block grants from the federal government to design and operate

---

<sup>1</sup> Components of the plan include: building and strengthening the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA); expanding the safety net for survivors; empowering and protecting young people from intimate partner violence; confronting online harassment, abuse, and stalking; ensuring justice for survivors; ending the rape kit backlog; addressing the deadly combination of guns and domestic violence; changing the culture that enables sexual violence; supporting the diverse needs of survivors; protecting and empowering immigrant women; and, leading the global effort to end gender-based violence.

<sup>2</sup> Safe leave is time off for safety reasons.

<sup>3</sup> General Assistance (GA) programs are funded with state dollars and meant to provide a safety net for people who are very poor and do not qualify for other cash assistance. In general, there is no federally-supported cash assistance program for very low-income adults without children. Thus, state or local GA programs are the only cash assistance for which adults without children can qualify. Unfortunately, only half of the states provide any type of GA, and often it is available only to individuals who have a disability or are otherwise deemed “unemployable.”

programs.<sup>4</sup> Recipients of TANF funds must complete an application and fulfill a number of requirements to obtain and maintain cash assistance. The TANF program includes the Family Violence Option (FVO), which attempts to address the additional challenges that survivors of family violence face by establishing safeguards to maintain confidentiality, referring survivors to supportive services, and waiving some program requirements and timelines.

TANF provides survivors of DV and SA with critical financial support.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, the program, as it is currently structured and administered, does not work well for many survivors for a number of reasons. First, the funding level is insufficient for survivors to maintain self-sufficiency. Second, many survivors find TANF difficult to access and its policies and practices challenging to navigate without the assistance of a DV or SA advocate.<sup>6</sup> Third, program barriers such as burdensome paperwork, documentation, orientation, and work requirements create additional challenges for survivors.<sup>7</sup> Fourth, survivors of DV and SA, who do not have access to transportation and child care, cannot easily meet with their caseworkers or get to and from interviews or their workplaces. Overall, the program is complicated, often rigidly administered, and not designed to quickly respond to the emergent needs of survivors. In addition, for survivors who are transgender, immigrants, or have limited English proficiency, TANF is even more inaccessible and unmanageable.

## **Oregon's Comprehensive, Survivor-Centered Plan with Cash Assistance**

Oregon has developed a comprehensive, survivor-centered plan that braids together both state and federal funding to support survivors of domestic violence. Described below are four components of the plan: (1) TANF-funded cash assistance program, (2) co-located advocacy program, (3) DV point-person program, and, (4) proposed state flexible cash assistance program.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Programs must support one of the four purposes of the TANF program: (1) provide assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives; (2) end the dependence of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; (3) prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and, (4) encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

<sup>5</sup> Shaina Goodman. (January 2018). *The Difference Between Surviving and Not Surviving: Public Benefits Programs and Domestic and Sexual Violence Victim's Economic Security*, joint report from the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, Center on Poverty and Inequality at Georgetown Law, and Economic Security and Opportunity Initiative. Retrieved from: [https://vawnet.org/sites/default/files/assets/files/2018-10/NRCDV-TheDifferenceBetweenSurvivingandNotSurviving-UpdatedOct2018\\_0.pdf](https://vawnet.org/sites/default/files/assets/files/2018-10/NRCDV-TheDifferenceBetweenSurvivingandNotSurviving-UpdatedOct2018_0.pdf)

The report represents the findings from a survey conducted from August – September 2017 that included 1,126 responses. A majority of the respondents –86.6% are advocates at domestic violence, sexual assault, or dual programs, but respondents also included those working at legal services, social services, anti-poverty, or housing/homeless agencies. Additionally, respondents worked at the local, state or territory level, national level, and tribal level and represented individuals from every state, DC, and American Samoa.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Information about Oregon's program was obtained through conversations and materials provided by Amber Harchuk, Domestic Violence Programs Lead at the Oregon Department of Human Services.

## **1. Temporary Assistance for Domestic Violence Survivors (TA-DVS)**

Since 1997, the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) has operated a Temporary Assistance for Domestic Violence Survivors (TA-DVS) program. This program uses a small amount of the state's federal TANF block grant to provide short-term cash assistance to survivors to address their emergent needs.<sup>9</sup> Under the program, survivors receive up to \$1,200 in a 90-day period to help them with crisis-related needs. Once the 90-day period ends, survivors can reapply for additional TA-DVS money.

**Eligibility:** The eligibility determination and the application process appear straightforward. To receive TA-DVS you must be:

- Fleeing DV or trying to stay safe from DV;<sup>10</sup>
- A parent or caregiver of a minor child or a pregnant person;
- A resident of Oregon;
- Meet other TANF eligibility requirements.

**Important Waivers:** Under the program, TANF requirements are waived, if the requirements would make it "difficult for survivors to escape domestic violence or puts them at risk of further or future domestic violence."<sup>11</sup> For instance, financial eligibility requirements and citizenship and noncitizen status requirements are waived under the program.<sup>12</sup> Also, there are no requirements to assign support rights,<sup>13</sup> no requirements to pursue assets, no requirements to participate in an employment program, and, in general, no burdensome requirements to verify that the applicant is a victim of DV.

**Application and Process:** Survivors apply for TA-DVS in person or by phone through their local ODHS Self-Sufficiency Office. They must complete the application process by filling out the Application for Services or complete a telephonic application that addresses

---

<sup>9</sup> The state adopted into statute the Family Violence Option in TANF and enacted Oregon Administration Rules that sets forth the requirements for TA-DVS. Information about the program can be found at the Oregon DHS website: <https://www.oregon.gov/dhs/abuse/domestic/pages/tadvs.aspx>. A brochure developed by Legal Aid Services of Oregon & Oregon Law Center provided valuable information for this paper. It can be retrieved at: <https://oregonlawhelp.org/files/CCDACC15-944D-570E-7F1F-7BBF3DECO018/attachments/38C72FE5-A7DB-6DBD-6714-0ABB0962CA04/tadvs-2017.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> "Domestic violence" means the occurrence of one or more of the acts described in subsections (a) to (d) of this section between family members, intimate partners, or household members:

- a. Attempting to cause or intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly causing physical injury or emotional, mental, or verbal abuse.
- b. Intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly placing another in fear of imminent serious physical injury.
- c. Committing sexual abuse in any degree as defined in ORS [163.415](#), [163.425](#) and [163.427](#).
- d. Using coercive or controlling behavior.
- e. As used in this section, "family members" and "household members" mean any of the following:
  - A. *Spouse*;
  - B. *Former spouse*;
  - C. Individuals related by blood, *marriage* (see section (44) of this rule), or adoption;
  - D. Individuals who are cohabitating or have cohabited with each other;
  - E. Individuals who have been involved in a sexually intimate or dating relationship; or
  - F. Unmarried parents of a *child*.

<sup>11</sup> Enacted into Oregon Administration Rules (OAR): Primarily [461-135-1200 Specific Requirements; TA-DVS](#) and [461-135-1230 Benefits; TA-DVS](#).

<sup>12</sup> Oregon uses state funds for survivors without legal immigration status.

<sup>13</sup> Assignment of support rights means that a parent transfers their rights to receive some or all of their child support payments to the state, to pay it back for public assistance benefits received from the state.

survivors' safety concerns and monetary needs. After a survivor applies, a DHS caseworker talks with the survivor about safety concerns and makes a plan jointly with the survivor (a two-page written form called the *Self-Sufficiency Domestic Violence Assistance Agreement*)<sup>14</sup> and provides information about local community and domestic violence advocacy resources. Once the application is submitted, ODHS must decide within two business days if the survivor's application is approved. If approved, the funds are available by survivor's request, including requests the same day.

TA-DVS money can be provided to survivors in addition to TANF, SNAP, and other benefits. ODHS recently created a streamlined application whereby residents can apply for all benefits in one application through one-portal. Confidentiality for TA-DVS is maintained as the application for TA-DVS is not included in the state agency system with the exception of four state employees that work in the program.

Financial Support: In general, this is not a **direct** cash assistance program. **In most instances, money is paid directly to the person or company providing the survivor with the service.** For example, the payment would go from ODHS to the landlord, the locksmith, the furniture store, etc.

Services: The types of services that survivors can use TA-DVS money for include, but are not limited to:

- Securing new or temporary housing, including paying a security deposit, first month's rent, or moving expenses;
- Purchasing necessities like used furniture, bedding, and kitchen items;
- Buying new locks, a motion detector, and/or security camera;
- Replacing personal items such as toiletries or clothing; and,
- Opening a post office box.

## **2. ODHS Co-Located DV Advocates Program**

Recognizing that survivors of domestic violence often have safety needs beyond immediate cash assistance, Oregon has developed an ODHS Co-Located DV Advocate program. Co-Located DV advocates are individuals from local domestic violence organizations who have a contract with ODHS to provide confidential and trauma-informed advocacy services in ODHS Self-Sufficiency and Child Welfare offices to ODHS clients. Services include, but are not limited to: safety planning, risk and fatality assessment, shelter services, and referrals to other community resources such as housing, mental health services, counseling, support groups, etc.

Co-Located DV Advocates also provide their expertise regarding domestic violence by participating with ODHS staff in case consultation, providing training, and attending workgroups and meetings to further improve services and develop policy. Co-Located DV Advocates provide confidential advocacy services to ODHS staff for either personal experiences or any potential secondary trauma.

---

<sup>14</sup> <https://sharesystems.dhsoha.state.or.us/DHSForms/Served/de1543.pdf>

### **3. ODHS Domestic Violence Points Program**

ODHS also supports a “Domestic Violence Points” Program. Domestic violence “Points” are ODHS staff located in all ODHS district offices who have agreed to take on a voluntary role as the “go to” person for domestic violence information. DV Points attend quarterly meetings, get updated information and resources, build relationships with Co-Located DV Advocates, and are knowledgeable in the processes and procedures for assistance for domestic violence survivors in their area.

### **4. Oregon’s Proposed New Investments for Survivors**

Oregon’s Governor, Kate Brown, will present her Recommended Budget to the Oregon legislature for consideration during the 2021 Legislative Session which starts January 2021. Governor Brown’s Recommended Budget includes a \$10 million investment to reach survivors who may not be receiving help from currently funded programs. The flexible funding targeted to tribes and culturally specific organizations gives tribes and organizations autonomy on how to administer their programs and provides survivors the agency to decide which supports they need to stay safe and maintain stability. In addition to serving survivors in a more culturally holistic way and providing resources for those who may be ineligible for TA-DVS, a portion of the funds will support the administrative costs of overseeing the program.

## **Community-Based Organizations’ Flexible Funding for Housing Stability<sup>15</sup>**

A number of community-based organizations have begun to provide flexible funding to DV survivors to help achieve housing stability. Flexible funding refers to financial support provided to survivors of DV to address whatever barrier exists for the survivor to achieve safe housing stability. Financial support is often provided in one of three ways: (1) payments to a third party as requested by the survivor; (2) survivor’s use of the organization’s credit card to purchase necessities or services; and, (3) direct cash assistance to the survivor to purchase what the survivor determines necessary to achieve housing stability. Importantly, ***longitudinal evaluations of programs in Washington, D.C. and evaluations of Domestic Violence Housing First programs in Washington state and California have shown that modest amounts of flexible funding can successfully help survivors achieve and maintain housing stability.***<sup>16</sup>

Flexible Funding and Housing Stability: Flexible funding generally is associated with housing stability. However, what constitutes “housing stability” is often interpreted broadly. As examples, flexible funding is used to transition a survivor from temporary

---

<sup>15</sup> Information for this section was derived from an excellent publication by the National Alliance for Safe Housing and the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, entitled *Flexible Funding for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Survivors*. It can be accessed at: <https://safehousingpartnerships.org/sites/default/files/2019-01/SafeHousingPartnerships-FlexFundingFAQ-Jan2019.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Studies and evaluations can be found at: <https://www.dashdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Sullivan-Bomsta-Hacskaylo-2016-Flex-funding-promising-strategy-JIV.pdf>; <https://wscadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/dvhfcohort1evaluationsummary.pdf>; [https://safehousingpartnerships.org/sites/default/files/2017-01/DVHF\\_FinalEvaluation.pdf](https://safehousingpartnerships.org/sites/default/files/2017-01/DVHF_FinalEvaluation.pdf); and <https://wscadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/CA-DVHF-Evaluation-Report-FINAL.pdf>.

shelter to permanent housing;<sup>17</sup> to prevent a survivor from becoming homeless by covering direct or indirect costs that impact housing stability;<sup>18</sup> and to address a survivor's housing needs through an existing program, such as Domestic Violence Housing First (DVHF).<sup>19</sup> The best programs serving survivors have four key elements:

#### Four Key Components:

- Low-barrier access
  - Must be easily accessible to meet survivors' immediate needs.
  - Little or no documentation to verify abuse.
  - No service requirements.
  - In general, decisions are informed by how effectively the flexible funding will directly or indirectly support housing stability.
- Quick dissemination of funds
  - Provide funds to survivors within 24-48 hours of request.
  - Funding decisions made by program advocates.
- Survivor-driven, trauma-informed mobile advocacy
  - Survivors identify their needs.
  - Advocacy and safety planning available alongside flexible funding grants.
  - Advocacy varies depending on needs of each survivor – may include emotional or support counseling, systems navigation, help with employment access, immigration or civil legal advocacy, support for children, landlord and housing advocacy.
- Flexibility
  - Funding flexibility to address the barriers that exist for a survivor to achieve housing stability.

Financing Flexible Funding Programs: Community-based organizations finance their flexible funding programs in creative ways, such as through the development of a public-private funding partnership, utilization of charitable foundation funding, fundraising appeals to the community, and/or through state, local or federal funding streams. Often community-based organizations combine resources to be able to provide flexible funding.

Below are six examples of organizations using flexible funds to empower and create housing stability for survivors.

- The California Office of Emergency Services
  - Funds Domestic Violence Housing First sites with a flexible funding component using Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds.<sup>20</sup>
- District Alliance for Safe Housing

---

<sup>17</sup> As examples, moving expenses, storage fees, security deposit, first month's rent, utility expenses.

<sup>18</sup> As examples, rent and/or rental arrears, safety features for the unit, automobile related expenses, child care, medical bills, school tuition and job training, travel to court appointments, and children's needs like camps and after school classes.

<sup>19</sup> The DV Housing First model supports survivors in maintaining current housing or rapidly accessing new safe and stable housing while providing advocacy and support to rebuild their lives free from abuse.

<sup>20</sup> More information about the DVHF model in California can be found at:

[https://www.cpedv.org/sites/main/files/main-images/dvvhf\\_infographic\\_exec\\_summary\\_final.pdf](https://www.cpedv.org/sites/main/files/main-images/dvvhf_infographic_exec_summary_final.pdf); see also, <https://wscadv.org/projects/domestic-violence-housing-first/national-implementation-of-domestic-violence-housing-first/>.



- Piloted Survivor Resilience Fund (SRF) through a public-private partnership with a local foundation and DC Office of Victim Services.<sup>21</sup>
- Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence
  - Successfully piloted a Domestic Violence Flexible Housing Assistance Program to provide direct, low-barrier, and flexible housing assistance to survivors.
  - Recently received a \$1 million grant from the Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement through the Justice Reinvestment Initiative to replicate Domestic Violence Flexible Housing Assistance Program throughout the state.<sup>22</sup>
- Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women
  - Uses an Allstate Foundation Purple Purse Moving Ahead grant to finance their flexible funding program for survivors and Allstate's Moving Ahead curriculum to train advocates on strategies for increasing survivor's economic empowerment.<sup>23</sup>
  - Survivors can submit requests for up to \$500 with the ability to request more.
  - Coalition received bonus money from a state agency to raise the cap so they can provide up to \$3000.
- The Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence
  - Funds Domestic Violence Housing First sites with a flexible funding component combining foundation money with state and federal funding.<sup>24</sup>
- Violence Free Colorado in collaboration with Colorado State's Division of Criminal Justice and Colorado Office for Victims Programs
  - Operates a 20-month Housing for Crime Victims Special Project with VOCA funds.<sup>25</sup>

IRS Considerations for Community-Based Organizations and Cash Assistance:<sup>26</sup> Direct grants to individuals from a non-profit can be made in two ways.

- *Disaster relief payment* – a cash grant can be made to address an individual's need arising out of a disaster or emergency. The kinds of needs include but are not limited to: medical costs, temporary housing, and financial aid to enable remaining in the home or to meet rent or mortgage payments on a primary home.
- *Gifting* -- a transfer of an asset to another individual. According to the IRS, the transfer cannot be contingent upon an event or action and the donor cannot have the ability to get the asset back. The IRS allows individuals to give up to \$14,000 annually to others without the donee needing to pay taxes.

---

<sup>21</sup> Information about the Resilience Fund can be found at: <https://www.dashdc.org/programs-services/survivor-resilience-fund/>.

<sup>22</sup> Information about the \$1 million grant to the Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence can be founded at: <https://lcadv.org/domestic-violence-coalition-secures-landmark-funding-for-domestic-violence-housing-program/>.

<sup>23</sup> Information about Minnesota's flexible funding program can be found at: <https://www.vfmm.org/economic-empowerment-program>.

<sup>24</sup> Information about Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence flexible funding program can be found at: <https://wscadv.org/projects/domestic-violence-housing-first/toolkit/flexible-financial-assistance/>.

<sup>25</sup> Information about Violence Free Colorado's program can be found at: <https://www.violencefreecolorado.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Housing-for-Crime-Victims-Special-Project-FAQs-1.20.2017.pdf> and <https://www.violencefreecolorado.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Housing-Project-Webinar-9.22.16.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Information about tax consequences comes from Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, an organization knowledgeable about tax requirements related to cash assistance. Relevant information can be found here: <https://wscadv.org/resources/financial-reporting-irs-flexible-financial-assistance/>

Implications for Survivors Receiving Flexible Funding: Cash assistance may adversely affect a survivor's ability to enroll in or take full advantage of public benefit programs because it may, depending on the state, count as income. Thus, it is critical that advocates fully understand what public benefits are available to survivors and the implications of accepting them in order to maximize survivors' options for support.

## FreeFrom Safety Fund<sup>27</sup>

In April of 2020, FreeFrom,<sup>28</sup> a California-based non-profit organization focused on addressing the connection between intimate partner violence and economic insecurity, launched a Safety Fund to get cash directly to survivors of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using funds from a GoFundMe campaign, they provided cash assistance to more than 1,100 survivors from 36 states and Puerto Rico, ranging in age from 18 to 71 years. The Safety Fund disbursed \$266,128. The average grant was \$244 and survivors used their funds primarily on food, household items, and household utilities.

Application for Cash Assistance: FreeFrom used Survey Monkey to set up an open-application for unrestricted cash for survivors. Available in both English and Spanish, the application required survivors to answer one question -- **whether they identified as a survivor of IPV**. All other questions were optional with the exception of information necessary to process grant payments, such as name, safest method to contact them, how much money they needed, and the safest way to disburse payments.

Safety Contacting and Getting Payments to Survivors: FreeFrom gave survivors options for safe communication throughout the grant process – email, text, or no communication. Almost half (48%) of survivors indicated email was safest, 51% opted for text messages, and 1% reported that there was no safe way to contact them. For those who indicated that there was no safe communication route, FreeFrom simply processed their payments. Additionally, FreeFrom asked survivors how they would like to receive their grant funds. A majority (52%) of survivors received their grants via checks in the mail; 27% received their grants via PayPal; and 21% received their grants via ACH/direct deposit.

Outreach to Survivors: FreeFrom learned that 50% of survivors heard about the Safety Fund through an IPV organization, underscoring the importance of IPV agencies as a source of critical information for survivors. Survivors also heard about the Safety Fund from social media (19%), family and friends (9%), another survivor (5%), an email listserv (3%), and other sources, such as schools and mutual aid funds (13%).

---

<sup>27</sup> Information for this section was derived from FreeFrom's report that discusses the importance of greater investments in and support for long-term financial security and safety for survivors. Kirkley, Doyle, Amy Durrence & Sonya Passi. (2020). *Survivors Know Best How to Disrupt Intimate Partner Violence during COVID-19 and Beyond*. FreeFrom. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56a24df4d8af10a5072bed7c/t/5f358b263ca8db1d891a3fc9/1597344678710/Survivors+Know+Best+Report.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> FreeFrom is a national organization, based in Los Angeles, whose mission is to dismantle the nexus between intimate partner violence and financial insecurity. <https://www.freefrom.org>.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Cash assistance serves as a critical **short-term** social support for survivors. It allows survivors of DV and SA to address emergency and basic needs. The Biden-Harris Administration has rightfully acknowledged that it is one of several actions that taken together can help survivors achieve safety and economic security.

Based on our analysis of the existing cash assistance programs, we offer four recommendations: (1) use federal dollars to develop and implement a flexible funding cash assistance program for survivors; (2) incentivize states to develop a Temporary Assistance for Domestic Violence Survivors program, similar to Oregon's; (3) transform the TANF program into a survivor-centered program that is more responsive and intentional about meeting the needs of survivors of domestic and sexual violence; and, (4) develop a Build Back Better Champions program to lift up innovative and extraordinary work being done to build economic security for individuals and families.

## **1. Use federal dollars to develop and implement a flexible funding cash assistance grant program for survivors.**

For survivors, safety and economic security are inextricably linked.<sup>29</sup> Providing cash assistance to survivors of DV and SA can help them address their emergent safety and financial needs quickly and effectively.<sup>30</sup> Cash assistance allows survivors to identify what will help or harm their stabilization and provides them with the means to do so. It also permits survivors to make payments or obtain services on their own without the potential stigma of having a non-profit DV or SA program paying on their behalf.

Importantly, a flexible funding cash assistance program must be available to all survivors, particularly those who are most marginalized, including immigrant survivors, and more must be done to meet the need of sexual assault survivors. Programs should also incorporate the four basic tenets: low barrier to access; quick dissemination of funds; survivor-driven, trauma-informed mobile advocacy; and flexibility.

Possible Administrators and Funding Sources for Cash Assistance Program: As noted below, the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) as well as the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) could serve as possible legislative vehicles for a cash assistance program. Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding via the Crime Victims Fund is another possibility as it currently allows third-party payments for survivors' housing-related and safety needs.

### **FVPSA**

- A flexible funding cash assistance program could be administered by the Family Violence Prevention and Services Program Office at the Department of Health and

---

<sup>29</sup> See comments by Mariah Wineski, Executive Director of Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence, in recent news coverage of the coalition's \$1 million grant, found at: <https://lcadv.org/domestic-violence-coalition-secures-landmark-funding-for-domestic-violence-housing-program/>.

<sup>30</sup> Flexible funding grants in Washington state, DC, and California help survivors achieve and maintain housing stability. FreeFrom and Oregon's TA-DVS programs demonstrate that survivors know best what their needs are and that cash grants can help them address their most pressing needs.

Human Services (HHS). It could be structured as an optional program that domestic violence coalitions could opt into or it could be structured as a demonstration project that a handful of coalitions could apply to administer. Funding for administration costs and for advocates should be included in any new program.

- Current emergency funding could be used now to begin implementation of the program with guidance from the FVPSA office. In addition, a flexible funding cash assistance program could be part of the reauthorization of FVPSA in the coming year.

## **VAWA**

- The federal flexible funding cash assistance program could be administered by the Office of Violence Against Women (OVW) at the Department of Justice. OVW could provide an additional formula grant to states for the purpose of providing cash assistance. The benefit of having a cash assistance formula grant is that all states can implement the program and can use their existing structures to do so. Another option is to provide funding for demonstration projects to a handful of programs.
- A flexible funding cash assistance program could be part of the reauthorization of VAWA.

## **VOCA**

- It may be possible to expand the use of VOCA funds to include cash assistance to address the needs of victims beyond housing and immediate safety needs. As a way of explanation, in 2016, the Office of Victims of Crime (OVC) issued a final rule to clarify the use of VOCA funds, including the use of VOCA to support safe and stable housing for survivors of DV and SA. The final rule was designed to provide State VOCA administrators with maximum flexibility to address survivors' housing needs, particularly as a result of victimization. Under VOCA, funds can be used for:
  - Expenses related to the relocation of victims;
  - Shelter for victims of DV or human trafficking, as well as when victims of SA need to move;
  - Children's needs related to support for child care, health needs and counseling;
  - Transportation needs related to accessing support services.

A significant drawback to using VOCA as the access point is that survivors often must participate with law enforcement as a means of receiving victim assistance or compensation. For survivors with uncertain immigration status, or for those who come from communities that do not trust law enforcement, this creates a barrier to access. A waiver of this requirement would likely be necessary to make it a viable option for many survivors.

Operating the Program at the Local Level: Because mobile advocacy and safety planning are critical components to any flexible funding program that serves survivors, community-based DV and SA programs would likely serve as ideal administrators or partners. To reach more survivors, DV and SA programs could be encouraged to partner with local health, education, and benefit offices, such as Community Health Centers, WIC providers, Head Start, etc.

## **2. Incentivize states to develop a Temporary Assistance for Domestic Violence Program.**

Oregon's use of its TANF block grant to implement TA-DVS is exemplary. The federal government should promote Oregon's program as a model and incentivize other states to develop their own TA-DVS as well as the ODHS Co-Located DV Advocate Program and the DV Points Program. One possible incentive is to increase TANF block grant funding to implement, administer, and staff the programs.

## **3. Transform TANF into a Survivor-Centered Program that is more responsive and intentional about meeting the needs of survivors.**

Given the importance of TANF to survivors' economic well-being, programs must provide more cash assistance to help survivors address their basic needs and become more accessible and responsive to survivors' circumstances. Below are recommendations from experts, who work with DV and SA survivors, on ways to improve and strengthen the program:<sup>31</sup>

- Strengthen public benefits policies at the state and federal levels by increasing the level of benefits provided, reduce barriers and increase access for survivors of DV and SA, and provide additional resources (such as transportation, child care, and work that provides a living wage) that promote economic security for individuals, families, and communities.
- Clarify and minimize where possible, at the federal and state level, the processes for screening for DV and SA, the exemptions or extensions that are available to survivors, and the documentation required of survivors.
- Provide ongoing training for DV and SA advocates on public benefits programs.
- Offer ongoing training for public benefits caseworkers on the dynamics of DV and SA, and on providing trauma-informed services and responses.
- Develop and sustain meaningful, collaborative partnerships between DV and SA programs and public benefits programs, as well as with other service providers working with low-income families.

## **4. Develop a *Build Back Better Champions* program to lift up innovative and extraordinary work being done to build economic security for individuals and families in order to drive change.**

Throughout the nation, there are people, organizations, schools, foundations, and businesses doing extraordinary and innovative work at the local and national level to empower and build economic security for individuals and families. The White House could develop a program – Build Back Better Champions – to recognize and lift up these local

---

<sup>31</sup> Shaina Goodman. (January 2018). *The Difference Between Surviving and Not Surviving: Public Benefits Programs and Domestic and Sexual Violence Victim's Economic Security*, joint report from the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, Center on Poverty and Inequality at Georgetown Law, and Economic Security and Opportunity Initiative. Retrieved from: [https://vawnet.org/sites/default/files/assets/files/2018-10/NRC-DV-TheDifferenceBetweenSurvivingandNotSurviving-UpdatedOct2018\\_0.pdf](https://vawnet.org/sites/default/files/assets/files/2018-10/NRC-DV-TheDifferenceBetweenSurvivingandNotSurviving-UpdatedOct2018_0.pdf)

and national innovators, like FreeFrom's Safety Fund, to drive change by encouraging organizations, agencies, states and individuals to develop their own efforts through learning from those who have been recognized.

## CONCLUSION

The Biden-Harris Administration recognizes that survivors cannot be safe unless they have economic security and that cash assistance is one critical support that can assist survivors, especially to meet emergency needs. Futures Without Violence recommends that the Administration implement all four cash assistance recommendations to help meet the immediate financial and safety needs of survivors. Also, the Administration should develop and support policies that make family-sustaining jobs, with sufficient pay and benefits, the norm and not the exception for survivors of DV and SA. Now is a crucial moment in our country to build on the successful work of the past and address children's and families' critical need for safety and economic security in the future.

*For additional information or to discuss, please contact Kiersten Stewart at Futures Without Violence, 202-277-8660 or [kstewart@futureswithoutviolence.org](mailto:kstewart@futureswithoutviolence.org).*